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Quail Hawkins

THE ART OF BOOKSELLING: QUAIL HAWKINS
AND THE SATHER GATE BOOK SHOP



QUAIL HAWKINS

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area Series

Quail Hawkins

THE ART OF BOOKSELLING: QUAIL HAWKINS
AND THE SATHER GATE BOOK SHOP

An Interview Conducted in 1978 by
Marsha Maguire

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FOREWORD

Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area

The art and business of printing in the San Francisco Bay Area are significant in the history of printing in the United States and have been an integral part of the cultural development of California. This series of interviews with people who have been participants in and observers of the recent history of San Francisco Bay Area printing stems from a 1958 interview by Francis P. Farquhar with Edward DeWitt Taylor. It has been carried forward in the interest of recording details of the movement and analyzing factors in its development.

To the series have been added interviews concerning other related aspects of the San Francisco Bay Area book world: writing, illustrating and designing books, and selling them as well.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in recent California history. The office is under the direction of Willa K. Baum, and under the administration of the Director of the Bancroft Library. Ruth Teiser is project director for the books and printing series.

PREFACE

Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area

The following is an interview devoted primarily to the professional aspects of bookselling, and as such, it rounds out the Regional Oral History Office project, Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area. Quail Hawkins bought and sold all types of books, but particularly children's books, for the Sather Gate Book Shop from 1926 until 1970. The Sather Gate Book Shop, perhaps the most prestigious bookshop in northern California for half a century, was known for the high quality of its stock and service, and Ms. Hawkins was instrumental in building that reputation. She was truly professional in offering guidance to both retail and wholesale customers; as Mae Durham Roger, instructor of children's literature at the University of California at Berkeley remarked, "She knew everybody, knew everything."

For those interested in children's books, these reminiscences illustrate the development of children's book publishing from a merely tangential concern of publishing houses to a major one. For booksellers, they communicate the fine points of the trade and highlight its most important -- albeit fading -- element: service to the customer.

Thanks are extended to all those who gave of their time to discuss with me the Sather Gate Book Shop and Quail Hawkins, as well as the changes that have taken place in Berkeley over the years: Fred Potter, George Good, George Bevan, Jeanne-Marie Lee, Alice Mellow, Renee Kennedy, Carolyn Kahn, William Garrett, Sarah Jencks, Simon Van Waay, and Mae Durham Roger. We are most grateful to Mrs. Carolyn Kahn for her generous donation which enabled us to transcribe the interview.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in the historical and cultural development of California and the West. The office is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, director of the Bancroft Library.

Marsha Maguire
Interviewer-Editor

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BOOKS AND PRINTING IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA*Interviews Completed by August 1979*

Dorothy & Lewis Allen, *Book Printing with the Handpress* 1968 (68 pp.)

Brother Antoninus, *Brother Antoninus: Poet, Printer, and Religious* 1966 (97 pp.)

Mallette Dean, *Artist and Printer* 1970 (112 pp.)

Edwin Grabhorn, *Recollections of the Grabhorn Press* 1968 (114 pp.)

Jane Grabhorn, *The Colt Press* 1966 (43 pp.)

Robert Grabhorn, *Fine Printing and the Grabhorn Press* 1968 (129 pp.)

Sherwood & Katharine Grover, *The Grabhorn Press and the Grace Hopper Press* 1972 (94 pp.)

Carroll T. Harris, *Conversations on Type and Printing*, 1967 1976 (209 pp.)

James D. Hart, *Fine Printers of the San Francisco Bay Area* 1969 (95 pp)

Quail Hawkins, *The Art of Bookselling: Quail Hawkins and the Sather Gate Book Shop* 1979 (155 pp.)

Warren R. Howell, *Two San Francisco Bookmen* 1967 (73 pp.)

Haywood Hunt, *Recollections of San Francisco Printers* 1967 (53 pp.)

Lawton Kennedy, *A Life in Printing* 1968 (211 pp.)

Oscar Lewis, *Literary San Francisco* 1965 (151 pp.)

David Magee, *Bookselling and Creating Books* 1969 (92 pp.)

Walter Mann, *Photoengraving, 1910-1969* 1973 (90 pp.)

Bernhard Schmidt, Herman Diedrichs, Max Schmidt, Jr. *The Schmidt Lithograph Company, Volume I* 1968 (238 pp.)

Lorenz Schmidt, Ernest Wuthmann, Stewart Norris, *The Schmidt Lithograph Company, Volume II* 1969 (157 pp.)

Albert Sperisen, *San Francisco Printers, 1925-1965* 1966 (91 pp.)

Jack W. Stauffacher, *A Printed Word Has Its Own Measure* 1969 (107 pp.)

Edward DeWitt Taylor, *Supplement to Francis P. Farquhar interview* 1960 (45 pp.)

Adrian Wilson, *Printing and Book Designing* 1966 (108 pp.)

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Quail Hawkins was a bookseller for the famed Sather Gate Book Shop in Berkeley from 1926 until 1970 as well as a respected author of children's books. She was interviewed for the Regional Oral History Office as a part of the project, Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Interviewer: Marsha Maguire interviewed Ms. Hawkins as an independent study project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the master's degree, School of Library and Information Studies, University of California at Berkeley.

Conduct of the Interview: Five interviews were held at Ms. Hawkins's Berkeley home on February 28, March 2, March 7, March 9, and March 13, 1978. Although still busy traveling and giving talks on children's books to various groups, Ms. Hawkins took the time to recount eagerly for the tape recorder her experiences in book buying, retail and wholesale bookselling, organizing book fairs, writing, and lecturing. Sadly, Ms. Hawkins's mother died during the second week of the interviews, but Ms. Hawkins generously agreed to carry on with her reminiscences. Ms. Hawkins has contacted the University of Oregon, where she has deposited her papers, as well as several friends for photos of herself and the Sather Gate Book Shop staff.

Previously Recorded interviews: A series of interviews with Ms. Hawkins was recorded by Anne Brower for the Regional Oral History Office in the fall of 1976. These interviews, which although indexed, have not yet been transcribed, concern Ms. Hawkins's childhood and family background and are available at the UC Berkeley Bancroft Library. Wherever necessary, references have been made to these earlier interviews.

Editing: The typed transcript was submitted to Ms. Hawkins who although stricken with a cold, spent many hours examining it and making minor changes in wording and punctuation. She also added a few paragraphs about several of her colleagues at the Sather Gate Book Shop.

Marsha Maguire
Interviewer-Editor

CHAPTER I

[Interview 1: February 28, 1978]
[begin tape 1, side 1]

First Job in a Book Department

Maguire: Our subject is the Sather Gate Book Shop, but first I did want to go back and begin with your years in high school and your first job in a bookstore.

Hawkins: Yes. Actually I hadn't been in a bookstore many times when I first got my job. One of the first times I remember going to the bookshop was when I was eight years old and my mother came in to buy some books for Christmas. She was picking out Mark Twain's Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. I can still remember. I was quite small and looked up at Mother and said, "I don't like that book." Mother said, "Oh, I didn't know you'd read it." [Laughing] That was the first time it ever occurred to me you couldn't like or not like a book if you hadn't read it. [Laughter]

So, when my father read it to us, the whole family was delighted with it and we laughed ourselves sick. We already had known about King Arthur so that it wasn't completely new, but the idea of the bicycles and everything was lots of fun.

Curiously enough, after Dad read it I read it to myself, and to my tremendous amazement I kept saying, "But this isn't a funny book, it's a sad book," and I cried. I've always felt that the book had an undercurrent of sorrow that I am amazed that I did discover at that age.

Well, to go on. When I was seven, I went to the public library and became good friends with the librarians. Jasmine Britten was the first children's librarian I knew when I was seven. But when I was around ten or so a new children's librarian came, Miss Leonore Townsend.

Hawkins: Miss Townsend and I became very good friends. She would pick out books that she thought I'd like. Even after I became thirteen years old and could have a card in the adult part of the library, I always called on her to ask her what was especially nice in the children's books.

Through her I took home for my father to read aloud the Three Mulla Mulgars by Walter de la Mare, which turned out to be our absolute favorite book. I hadn't really wanted to take it but I didn't want to be impolite to Miss Townsend. I didn't think I'd be interested in a book about monkeys, but I really loved it. We all were crazy about it.

So, Miss Townsend and I kept in touch. One time when I dropped in--I was a sophomore in high school--to say hello to her she said, "I'm going to be at Graham's [John W. Graham Co.] all week next week. It was the first Book Week.* She said, "Do come in and see me. I'm going to be lonesome."

It was in November, and high school wasn't too far away to walk down to Graham's, which was in downtown Spokane. She introduced me to the head of the department, said that I was a good reader and one of her friends. So, I looked around. I looked on the shelves and I was fascinated because the shelves were very high, and a ladder ran along that you could climb up to get books the way they used to have in shoe stores in my youth.

I looked up at the books and I'd say, "Oh! I've read that. I've read that, haven't I, Miss Townsend?" I was picking out all my favorites, and I realized that I'd read a great many of these books. I kind of laughed and I said, "I really ought to be working here. I know all the books." I didn't think anything more about it.

That evening when I was at home, before my father came home, Mr. Heaton, who was the head of the book department, called me on the phone. Mr. Heaton asked me if I would care to come and work at Graham's till Christmas. I was absolutely, completely astounded. I said, "But Mr. Heaton, I'm going to school." He said, "Yes, I know. But we could use you after school and on Saturdays until Christmas."

I said, "Well, I have to ask my father," which I did. I remember Dad saying, "Well Quail, when you get out of school you're going to have to work for a living, and this would be good experience. I

*Book Week, the idea of Publishers' Weekly editor Frederic Melcher, was established to promote children's books in 1922.

Hawkins: think this would be fine."

So, I went to work at Graham's while I was a sophomore in high school; this was in 1922. It was like being turned loose in a candy store. Of course, I wasn't to be a salesgirl, you understand. I was supposed to be a stock girl. They had loads and loads of books on an upper floor. I would go up in the elevator and fill in titles in the different series that had been sold during the day. My job was to fill in stock. Mrs. Robinson, the head saleswoman would tell me what was wanted and I'd run up and get them.

But it was like being in a candy store. I just loved it. I was allowed to sell if every clerk was busy; otherwise I wasn't.

Maguire: Was it a large staff?

Hawkins: Oh, there were probably two or three. But Spokane wasn't a very booky community. As a matter of fact, I usually had to first sell them the idea they really wanted a book before I could sell them a book. [Chuckle] It was really funny. Mother called it a cultural lag. She said that Spokane was a young town—and it was—and that the people there had not had generations of readers. They were people who had moved out from the eastern part of the U.S.—farmers, miners and lumbermen—and although there were a number of English people who had come down from Canada, as a whole it was not a very booky town.

I worked after school and on Saturdays for two years till I graduated. I was so happy. I can't even begin to tell you what excitement it was for me.

Love of Reading

Maguire: I would have thought that you would have missed your free afternoons after school and your Saturdays.

Hawkins: I'd rather read than do anything in the world, even then. I think, as a matter of fact, it was partly an escape. I didn't have that many friends and I wasn't the most popular girl. I didn't go to all the dances and I didn't dance very well. Parties were always somewhat of a bore to me. People thought I was queer because I liked to read.

Maguire: Books were most important?

Hawkins: Books meant so much to me. Our whole family loved books and we were

Hawkins: all readers. Books all over the house. They were under the bathtub and they were in the kitchen and they were in the bedrooms; they were under the beds; they were in the closets; books everywhere, you know.

I remember when I was seventeen discovering Alice in Wonderland in a beat up edition in a ragbag in a closet. I didn't like Alice when I was a little girl. I remember thinking it was silly. I didn't get it young enough, you see. You have to have it when you're about five, because when you're nine or ten, the wit and the play on words doesn't hit you and the story seems kind of silly. When I was seventeen I said, "Well, I wonder what people think this book is so good for." I happened on the Mock Turtle story. Do you remember where he said, "The Classical master...was an old crab, he was." [Laughter] "He taught Laughing and Grief." I started laughing at this. I thought it was so funny that I changed my mind about Alice, and it has been one of my favorite books ever since.

It was great fun for me to share with people the excitement that I had with books.

Maguire: Do you remember the first few times that you sold books? Everyone's busy and now it's your turn to go down and--

Hawkins: I can't remember the exact time because I was so eager to sell that I'm sure that I rushed in. But I do remember finding a book in stock that I desperately wanted for myself. I didn't know that you could lay it aside. It cost \$3.50. I was being paid about eight dollars a week. It was on the basis of six days a week, eight hours a day, \$13.50. It never occurred to me I could ask and they would let me buy it a little at a time.

It was a beautiful book of Bengal fairy tales illustrated by Rabindranath Tagore [The book is F.B. Bradley-Birt's Bengal Fairy Tales, New York: John Lane, 1920].

There were only three illustrations, but they were in color and they were absolutely exquisite. I yearned for that book, and I was so excited about it that I sold it right out from under, and it was the only one. It was an importation. [Laughter]

Books in the Early 1920s

Hawkins: Then I also remember, though, one Christmas I was buying books. I got a discount because I was working there. We got the books at cost. The books were marked. Each book was marked so that you knew how

Hawkins: much it cost. It was a code, but you could tell what it was. In those days, you know, books were really very reasonable. You could get loads of nice books for fifty cents apiece. I think the Everyman Library was costing sixty cents a copy as I recall it, at that time.

Maguire: These are all hard bound books?

Hawkins: Hard bound, oh yes. The paperbacks were not available in those days at all. The jackets on books were manila paper with just a hole cut to show the title on the spine. There weren't colorful pictures and bright jackets as there are now.

In fact while I was at Graham's, the book jacket began to come in. Alfred Knopf and also Doubleday--Page and Company as it was then--began to put jackets on their novels. Serious books still didn't have jackets. But they began to make the outside of the book look more attractive and more interesting for people.

At any rate, I remember I always got the same number of books for everybody. I had six brothers by then, and I didn't want anybody to feel left out. I was short one book for one of the kids, and I happened to pick up an Everyman edition of Pinnochio. Curiously enough, although I'd read so many children's books, I'd never read Pinnochio. It had lots of pictures in it. I knew it was a classic and I thought they might enjoy it. It was the most popular book I had given to anybody. The whole family adored it. [Laughter] So, you see, I had to sell myself books.

Full time Job at Graham's, Spokane

Hawkins: After I graduated in 1924 from high school, I thought I'd like to get a full time job. I went down to see Mrs. Robinson who was the head saleswoman. I'd ask her if there was an opening and she'd say no, and then I'd go away.

But there was also Miss [Mabel] Collins who was heading the school department. They, the wholesale department, sold to schools and libraries which I knew nothing about at that time at all. I was strictly retail. But I knew Miss Collins and she was very fond of me. I said I wanted to work there but there was no job. She said, "Have you been up and applied at the office in the employment department?"

I said, "Why no. Do you have to do that?"

She said, "Why certainly. Didn't Mrs. Robinson tell you?"

I said, "Why no, she didn't."

Hawkins: She said, "I'll take you up." She took me up, and inside of two days I got a job in the book department on the balcony checking in express packages. I discovered later that Mrs. Robinson was a little jealous of me, which was absolutely something I had no idea of. I admired her enormously and couldn't believe that anybody would be jealous of me. I couldn't see why they would be. [Laughing] There was no reason that I could understand.

I was opening packages. I wasn't selling at all. I was opening express packages. It was like Christmas every day, opening packages and finding out what was inside of them. The only difficulty was that Mrs. Robinson would want to get her special orders for her customer as fast as possible, and she'd see a small package of books waiting for an invoice--and she'd snatch the book she wanted. Then we'd have an argument about her not taking a book until I released it after it had been priced. That was when I began to find the problems of working with other people.

You know it's curious about working with other people. One of the things that I've always maintained was that I wouldn't fight with people. I'm really rather peace loving, to tell you the truth, although I have a temper. I would protest but not really fight. She was Irish and she had a really short fuse. So we tangled a bit. Curiously, I still like her, but we argued.

Maguire: But were you holding you own?

Hawkins: I did. I finally made it very clear that I couldn't be stampeded. She would have to wait. Then after about a month or so, coming into Christmas time, Mr. Heaton moved me down into the book department to sell. It was coming up November for Book Week. They had a marvelous display department in Graham's. It wasn't just a bookshop. It was a big, big company that sold furniture and paper and desks and all kinds of things, as well as doing wholesale business in books with all the libraries and schools in Montana and Idaho and Washington. They were a big, big business.

The store ran through a block. It was in the middle of the block, but it had two windows and an entrance on one side, and went straight through, and then had two windows and an entrance on the other street. For Book Week, all four windows were going to be for display of children's books, and they wanted some ideas.

Just about that time Vachel Lindsay had done a poem called "The Elements of a Good Adventure." I thought it would be fun to have adventure stories in one window and have a sign saying, "The Elements of a Good Adventure," and then having a volcano in the background, and a pirate shop with someone being kicked off the plank, and buried treasure. You know, all that sort of thing.

Hawkins: Then there was one that was made a fairy tale window, books of fairy tales. Then there was one for boys' and girls' books. Well, this young man in the display department made the most fascinating windows, you can't imagine. They were so exciting that the people just gawked outside. There was a crowd around the windows for the entire week.

Word came down, "Whose idea was this?" I didn't know. Nobody told me. Miss Collins said, "I told Mr. John W. Graham that it was your idea." Mr. Graham sent for me to come up and see him. I went up to the great man's office, scared to death, and he told me he was very pleased with what the reception was, and after this my salary was going to be \$15.00 a week instead of \$13.50. So that was my first raise.

Brief Stay in Yakima

Hawkins: I stayed in Spokane till the fall of 1925. My father was transferred to Yakima, Washington. The family moved down there. I really didn't know what to do, whether to stay on and work, because I was living at home and I paid twenty dollars a month room and board. I knew that it would cost more than that to live in Spokane. I really didn't know whether I could make a go of it or not.

Maguire: Did you want, at this point, to keep on selling books? Was this something that you felt you would be doing for a long time?

Hawkins: Well, I liked it, but I hadn't really decided that this was the thing I wanted to do in life. In fact, my father moved down to Yakima, and I was having a vacation up at Coeur d'Alene Lake [Idaho], and he called me and said he had a job for me in Yakima for ninety dollars a month, which was more than fifteen dollars a week, you see.

Maguire: That helped you out of your dilemma.

Hawkins: I would stay with the family and pay them their twenty dollars a month. I was a file clerk in a fruit cooperative called the Big Y. I stayed there for four months.

Move to Berkeley

Hawkins: But on January 1, 1926, I was at sea on my way to California, because I had decided in the meantime that I wanted to go on to college. Before that I hadn't really thought that I would go to college, but--

Hawkins: and I can't tell you where--I got the idea that I really must go on and have more schooling.

I chose California because it was far enough away so my family couldn't call me back at every crisis. On the other hand, I had relatives living in San Francisco, so I wouldn't be too far from family. That's how I happened to go to California.

Of course, [chuckle] January is not the time to get a bookshop job. Everybody lets off extra help right after Christmas, and I arrived about the fifth or sixth of January. I came down by ship. I enjoyed it enormously. I always go on a ship if I can.

I think I already told about working for Ginn and Company, didn't I or did I?"*

Maguire: Very briefly.

Hawkins: Very briefly. That was a job in a publishing house, but all I did was stuff envelopes. I did get a picture of all the school departments and everything because their advertising material went out to different school districts. It was my introduction to the importance of counties in California. [Chuckle]

The job was supposed to be for two weeks, but it lasted two months. Then I had to dig around and find a job. The only experience I had was in a bookshop, so naturally I tried. I almost got a job working in the Emporium. In fact, Mr. Thornton, who was the department head, had already interviewed me and had told me how much the salary was; it was eighteen dollars a week and there was commission pay, but the commissions were pooled and everybody got the same amount. He said I would never make less than \$3.50 a week on my commissions.

But one of the things he asked me was, could I sell fifty dollars worth of books a day. I said, "Why, I have no idea. I'll sell to as many customers as you have come in, if they're willing to buy, but I can't tell you whether it's going to be fifty dollars. I don't know how many people you have coming in. How can I tell?"

*Recorded by Anne Brower in an interview for the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Untranscribed tapes available at The Bancroft Library; Ginn and Company story recorded November 8, 1976, approximately seven minutes into tape 1, side 2.

Maguire: Fifty dollars would have been a large amount?

Hawkins: In those days, a pretty fair amount. But the Emporium had a very big book department.

First Years at Sather Gate Book Shop

Hawkins: Did I tell in the other tape how I got my job at Sather Gate Book Shop?*

Maguire: You did. You mentioned something about the fact that you had dropped into the bookstore.

Hawkins: Yes.

Maguire: But there were no jobs.

Hawkins: Yes, I dropped into the bookshop and met Mrs. [Constance] Mitchell, who was the head of the children's department. She said that she had a girl working for her. She said, "She's not satisfactory, but I'm not about to fire her." But she seemed rather impressed with my year's work in the children's department at Graham's, and the fact that Miss Collins had been a librarian, and that she and I had been friends, and that I'd read a lot.

I found out that I couldn't go to the university [the University of California, Berkeley] without paying seventy-five dollars because I was an out-of-state resident, and it would take a year to become a resident. Then I would pay twenty-five dollars. So I decided that I would become a resident. I dropped again into the bookshop because I liked the shop. It was just a place that I thought I'd like to work. Mrs. Mitchell saw me, and she beckoned to me, and when I came up she said, "Have you taken the [Emporium] job yet?"

I said, "No, I think I'm going to take it next week, but I haven't taken it yet."

*Recorded by Anne Brower in an interview for the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Untranscribed tapes available at The Bancroft Library; story of employment at Sather Gate Book Shop recorded November 8, 1976, approximately eight minutes into tape 1, side 2.

Hawkins: She said, "Well, come back in about half an hour. I want to talk to you."

So, I spent half an hour looking at the books and enjoying it. When the salesman left, she called me and said that the girl that she had had left, and if I'd like to I could come and work at twenty dollars a week.

That was just right for me. That's how I started my career at Sather Gate. It was an absolutely fascinating job. I never made any money to speak of. In fact, a good stenographer made more money than I did when I was at the very top. But I never had a day when I didn't want to go to work. I never had a day when I wished I were doing something else. Every day was full of something new. I never could tell what it was going to be.

Mrs. Mitchell was a marvelous teacher. She was a children's librarian from Portland, Oregon. She was very subtle. She was my idea of what a good boss should be. She turned me loose, used very light reins, but she did use reins. She kept giving me books to read that had to do with library service, had to do with serving your public.

The idea was that you sold books, not wrapped them up. If somebody came in and wanted to browse, they could browse. Nobody objected. They could stand there on one foot or the other and read all day long if they wanted to. But if someone wanted help, it was up to you to provide it, to bring out the books the person might want, to know where all the books were if a customer asked for a specific title. You had to know about different editions. If someone wanted a classic such as Pinnochio, it was up to you to know how many editions were in stock and bring them out for the customer to choose from.

Maguire: Had you had this kind of training before in your first job?

Hawkins: You obviously picked up things, but Mrs. Mitchell really trained me. We discussed books, whatever I was reading or had been reading. She would guide me to specific books: "This is a book that I think you'll enjoy," and, "You might like this," very casually, not any great to-do.

I do remember one time, though, that was really rather funny. There were certain books, of course, that didn't sell. In those days you didn't return the books to the publishers. They were yours. If you couldn't sell them, well, that was just too bad. You had to sell them on a sale or somehow get rid of them. I remember there were certain books she picked out--they were perfectly good books but they simply weren't moving--and she thought that she would get us specifically to show these books.

Hawkins: So she offered us--her two salesgirls--ten cents for each book that we sold, and every time we sold one, we'd write the name of the book and our name on a slip and put it in a little box. At the end of week, she'd pull out the slips, and she would give you ten cents or fifty cents or whatever you'd sold. We called these books "little treasures." [Laughter] One day I found myself saying to a customer, "This book is a little treasure." I thought, "Quail, how awful!" I quickly took it away. I was so ashamed of myself. [Laughter]

Also, speaking of that, many years later Sara Jencks had an idea. She said, "It makes me so mad that customers are always picking up books you've laid aside for somebody who has telephoned for them and wanted to buy them, and it's always the last copy." So she said, "I'll fox 'em." So she put a sign in a book that she thought wasn't getting a good enough play, put it on the desk by the phone, and put in a slip that said, "Mrs. Woggins will call."

Mrs. Woggins was the cow in Freddy the Detective by Walter Brooks. [Laughter] Inevitably somebody would pick that book up and say, "I'd like this." So she'd haul out Mrs. Woggins' name and wrap the book up. [Laughter] That's what I call indirect selling.

But I wasn't clever enough to think of that. However, one of the first things I remember at Sather Gate Book Shop--I told you earlier that Spokane wasn't terribly booky and that I had to sell the idea of a book before I could actually sell the book. This woman came in to the Boys and Girls Book Room at Sather Gate Book Shop. She was rather tall and severely dressed, and I'm sure that she must have come from New England. She looked austere. At any rate, she wanted me to show her some books for certain ages, and I started telling her about how marvelous books were and everything, and she said very coldly, "I already know about books. That's why I'm here."

I was crushed. In my embarrassment, I rushed around and I pulled out this book or that book or whatever book. Now I must explain that in Spokane, the only time you ever sold twenty-five dollars worth of books was at Christmas time. Very rarely did anybody buy more than one book. Well, I was pulling out these books right and left to cover embarrassment. All of a sudden she gathered up an armload, and she handed it to me and said, "I'll take these."

My mouth just dropped open. I said, "You'll take these?"

She said, "Yes. Have you any objection?" [Laughter]

"Oh no, no," I said, "None at all!" And it was twenty-five dollars worth of books, and the books in those days cost \$1.50 and \$1.00 and \$1.75. It took quite a few books to make twenty-five dollars, and it was only March, not Christmas.

Maguire: These were all books that you'd pulled out rather haphazardly.

Hawkins: Yes, in a way. They were for the right ages. Oh, I was so astonished! I still remember vividly. "Have you any objection?" she said. [Laughter]

Sather Gate's Owner: Eugene Sommer

Hawkins: The boss man at Sather Gate Book Shop was Mr. Eugene Sommer. Mrs. Mitchell told me about Mr. Sommer when I came to work. She said, "He's a very fine man, but he has a habit of leaving dead cigars around, and if you smell them, you must pick them up and get rid of them." She said, "We all call him 'Father' or sometimes 'Papa'." But he was like a father to all of us. He really and truly had a feeling for all of us.

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

Mr. Sommer was a person who apparently felt that women were very good salespeople, and he respected them. He paid good wages for what the times were. He let you do whatever you felt you should do, but he watched.

I remember very shortly after I came, I was selling not only in the children's department, but I also was selling fiction, and for some reason or other--I don't know how it happened--I sold an unabridged Webster's dictionary. It was an India paper edition and it was leather bound and it cost thirty-five dollars.

Mr. Sommer happened to see me do it, and after that, I was in. I mean, he felt I was a good salesgirl and he respected me. I remember one funny incident during the depression when sales were very scanty. I had just had a customer leave when Mr. Sommer came to me. He looked very sad and depressed. "She didn't buy anything, did she?" he asked.

"Why, yes, Mr. Sommer, she did."

"Did she have it delivered?"

"No, Mr. Sommer, she took it with her."

"Did she charge it?"

"No, Mr. Sommer, she paid cash."

"Did she get a discount?"

Hawkins: "Yes, Mr. Sommer, she did?"

With each answer Mr. Sommer looked gloomier and gloomier. When I said she got a discount, he shrugged his shoulders in his typical style, and threw out his arm and said, "Well, how can you make any money?"

He was a German Jew who came first to New York, working at Putnam's bookstore sweeping the store, and when he came to S.F. he had worked for the White House Book Department and is credited with starting the book department at the Emporium before coming to Berkeley. Alice Mellow says she thinks the Sather Gate Book Shop began sometime in the late 'teens as she first worked there in 1920-1924, but not in the book department of the shop. It was first in small quarters on Bancroft Way, and by 1923 was located on Telegraph Avenue where Sproul Hall is now. Mr. Sommer liked women and gave them authority and positions of trust. I was very pleased that he liked my selling abilities.

Maguire: Did he ever give you any tips on selling or did he just let you do it on your own?

Hawkins: He let you do it on your own. He always prowled and was always there early in the morning. I remember that he'd come in at 7:30 in the morning, and it was the job of some one person to come in at 7:30, because Mr. Sommer would walk in and leave the door open and go up to count the cash. It was important if a customer dropped in, there'd be somebody there to wait on him. Mostly it was somebody in the stationery department, because mostly people wanted to buy blue books* or something of that sort, you know, not anything very much.

There was a woman named, well, we called her "Mrs. Pink Ink." It seems that she had come in one morning early and asked for some ink, and when the clerk asked her what color she said in an aggravated tone, "Color!? Why, black ink of course. What do you think I want, pink ink?" So, we called her Mrs. Pink Ink. She'd come in fairly often and really was very difficult. I think the woman was a little off, frankly.

One week, I was the one who had to be there at 7:30, and I knew nothing about stationery at all. We had a large stationery department. This woman came in and asked for some onionskin paper, and I really didn't know where to look. I knew what onionskin paper was,

*Blue books, so named because of their blue paper covers, are booklets in which the college students write their final examinations.

Hawkins: but I didn't know how to find it. I was searching around. She was making caustic remarks. All of a sudden it dawned on me that this was Mrs. Pink Ink, and it struck me as so funny that I was hard put to it to be polite.

She was just tearing me up one side and down the other. Finally she said [severely], "I'd get girls like you fired. What is your name?" I did try very hard to be polite, but I'm afraid that my sense of humor was getting the best of me. Nothing, of course, happened. But that was one of Mr. Sommer's habits, coming early.

But he also was a genius in books really. I remember one time. This was in 1934 when I was then head of the children's department. The depression was still being felt, and for the buyer to buy more than twenty-five copies of a book meant the book was very good. So this particular time, Denny Chase, who sold books for Harcourt Brace-- he was probably one of the most respected of the book salesmen. The book salesmen in those days really read books. They knew what they were talking about, and Mr. Chase certainly did.

At any rate, he came in and said, "Now Quail, I'm going to ask you to do something that you're not going to want to do, but I'm asking you to do it. I have a new book here by a new author. She's English and this is her first book and the book is \$2.50 and it's a fantasy and I want you to buy 250 copies."

Maguire: Was \$2.50 a high price for a book at that time?

Hawkins: Oh yes, a very high price. I said, "Oh, Denny, I'll buy 75 copies at your suggestion, but 250?" Just then Mr. Sommer happened by. I said, "Mr. Sommer, Denny wants me to buy 250 copies of this book." He hadn't heard anything. He just picked the book up and put it in his hand and ran his hand over it. He didn't even open it. He did like this [gesturing], and he said, "Denny's right. Get 250 copies." What do you think the book was? Mary Poppins. [Laughter] Wasn't that wonderful? But he had that quality. He just ran his hand over it.

Maguire: Didn't he look at it?

Hawkins: He did not open it. But I know he respected Denny's perspicacity. I'm sure if it had been another salesman, he might not have concurred. But in this case he did. But he gave us a free hand.

College

Hawkins: I mentioned in the earlier tapes* that I had gone to school for one semester at Cal [University of California, Berkeley], didn't I?

Maguire: No, you didn't.

Hawkins: I came [to California] in '26, so in January 1927, I was a resident. So I went to school. I'd been working at Sather Gate Book Shop, and they said that they would let me work four hours a day, and they paid me forty cents an hour. You know, that's \$1.60. It isn't very much money.

My cousin was going to give me fifty dollars a month, but I thought that was too generous, so she said she would give me four hundred dollars for the semester.

I had a roommate who was putting herself through school. A very nice person, Eloise Evans was her name. She was the youngest of seven and I was the eldest of seven. We became good friends. Her sister had divorced her brother-in-law. Her brother-in-law was going to China and Eloise's sister had gone to New York. The brother-in-law didn't want to give up his little garden cottage.

Hawkins: So he told her that if she would live in it and pay the rent, we could have anything that was there, you know, the food that was in the place, and all the furniture and everything we could use. She was paying \$12.50 per month in her place, and she only was making about \$65.00 a month. She was putting herself through school, and she couldn't afford \$25.00 a month.

*Reference to a series of interviews recorded in 1976 by Anne Brower for the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Untranscribed tapes available at The Bancroft Library.

Hawkins: So she asked me if I would share \$12.50, and she'd go on with \$12.50. My garden cottage was costing me ten dollars a month. Of course, it didn't have a bathroom and it didn't have running water in it or anything, but nonetheless, it was livable. I could go to the bathroom which was on the back porch of the house in front, and there was a hose bib outside so I had water and all that.

I went to school one semester and then I couldn't go on anymore. I just didn't have enough money. So they offered me twenty-five dollars a week if I'd come back to Sather Gate Book Shop full time. That's how I happened to go back.

Maguire: Were you disappointed that you couldn't keep attending school?

Hawkins: The funny part was, at that time I wasn't. I was twenty-two years old when I went to school, and all the kids were about eighteen. The freshman courses were awfully easy for me. Mind you, I didn't get straight A's, but they were more like high school courses it seemed to me.

I had Benjamin Lehman as my composition teacher in English 1A. That was very interesting. I enjoyed it a great deal and I learned a lot, did a lot of work, a lot of writing which was good for me. I remember that Lehman said that the only person who would get an A in that class would be someone who had a distinct talent for writing, and I got an A-minus. Of course, it comes out as an A, but it was A-minus. I asked him if he thought I had a distinct talent for writing. He drew himself up and said very pontifically, "It takes a million lobster eggs to make a lobster," [laughter] which I didn't relish at that time. But, of course, he was right.

I took French and I took zoology and philosophy besides. I do not recommend philosophy to any young, young person. I think philosophy is for older people. [Laughing]

Maguire: That's quite a heavy load though.

Hawkins: I think I got an A, two B's, and a C. That was the way it was. I got a C in French. [Laughing] I'm no linguist. I worked hard too, but I just am no linguist at all.

No, I got two A's, a B, and a C. I got A in zoology; I got C in philosophy and B in French. The philosophy is what I got C in.

Hawkins: I just didn't understand it or get anywhere with it.

Maguire: Did you have any plans for a major subject?

Hawkins: I was going to take English, but I thought to myself, "Well, it's just a reading course, and I've got all the books at Sather Gate Book Shop, and I talked to them all. "I'll just get reading lists from them," and I could read on my own, you see.

The one thing I'm glad about--I think everyone who has any curiosity should go to college at least one semester because it teaches you that you don't know anything. I think about the only thing I really learned in college was how little I knew, how very little. I think that's the main object of college. If you get out of college and think you know something, then college hasn't been really what it should be. It should teach you how much there is in this world to learn, I think.

I gradually learned that in life. There are still so many things I don't know that I wish I could. I read things and half understand them and get just little, little insights now and then and think, "Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if I had the kind of mind that could absorb this and really understand it," particularly things to do with science, which fascinates me. It really does.

Working in New York City

Hawkins: In 1929, I left Sather Gate Book Shop to go to New York. I had worked in Berkeley from '26 to '29, three years. By that time I felt pretty big, you know. I thought I knew all about children's books.

I decided that I really wanted to be an editor of children's books, and I thought that New York was the next place to go. In 1929, the children's book scene was a very exciting one. It was very, very thrilling. Some of the most beautiful books were being published. It's hard to describe the air of excitement about the children's books that were coming out. Some books published in the '20s and '30s are still delightful. I'm seeing new reprints of things like Kay Nielsen's East of the Sun and West of the Moon and, oh, any number of beautiful books.

Louise Seaman was the children's editor at Macmillan, a most distinguished woman. She did more for children's literature in this country than any one person that I can think of. She was the first children's editor who had a separate department in publishing. She went to work for Macmillan in 1919. I admired her enormously, every-

Hawkins: thing about her. In fact she helped me a great deal. I think I told in one of the tapes* about my experience with Ernestine Evans and how Louise Seaman had picked me up when I had been down.

I came back to Sather Gate Book Shop in 1931, having worked in New York and worked in a bookshop. I worked for Publishers' Weekly doing odd jobs, and I worked at Macy's in New York in their book department. That was a very unhappy experience because it was the first time I'd ever been in a place where they didn't care if you sold another book. It was a loss leader.** They said that they were selling at six percent under everything, and only certain things had set prices, you see; phonograph records and books had set prices. Other things, you couldn't always tell.

When I went to New York, I went to try to get a job in a publishing house. I only had about thirty-five dollars, something like that. Mr. Blake, Jim Blake, was the salesman for Harper's. I went into Harper's to see the children's editor, who was Virginia Kirkus at that time. As I went in, he saw me when I asked at the window. He said, "Come on in!" Or I guess the girl at the window said, "Mr. Blake wants to see you."

So he said, "Now, Quail, I've got a job for you down at Macy's. Go on down there and get it. Mr. Sommer got it for you at the ABA [American Booksellers Association] meeting in Boston. He told me to tell you if you came in to go in and get it. It's waiting for you."

So I said, "What's Macy's?" [Laughter]

He looked at me as if I were crazy and said, "Well, ask anybody."

I said, "I'm asking you!" So he told me, and I went down to Macy's and I got the job. But it was a wrap-up job. It wasn't really a selling job, as far as I could see, and I hated the department store atmosphere. It was noisy. And it was a very hot summer. Air conditioning was just coming in, and [the store was] kept so cold that I had to wear a wool dress to work in. Then you'd come out into the stifling heat and burst into perspiration. It was really a very, very difficult place.

*Recorded by Anne Brower in an interview for the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Untranscribed tapes available at The Bancroft Library; Louise Seaman and Ernestine Evans stories recorded November 15, 1976, approximately seven minutes into tape 1, side 2.

**A loss leader is a commodity which is sold by a retail store at less than cost in order to attract customers.

Hawkins: Then there was no arrangement. You couldn't find books. Oh, it was a very difficult thing, and I was trying to think how we could sell more books. I said something to Miss McClure, who was the head of the book department. She said, "We don't care if we never sell another book. We lose money on every book we sell."

Maguire: This was the head of the book department?

Hawkins: Yes. At that moment I decided that I didn't want to work in Macy's anymore.

Maguire: It must have been a real disappointment after your earlier experiences.

Hawkins: It was. I didn't want to work for [them]. I remember they "shopped" me. In those days--I don't know whether they do it still in department stores--but they used to send a "shopper" around to see what the clerks were doing. If you could sell something to them, then you were a very good salesman. But nothing was actually sold, you see; it came back. You didn't know who the shopper was. But someone shopped me, and they sent for me up in the personnel department and I went up. They told me I had had a very good report.

I said, "I'm curious to know what book it was that I 'sold'." She told me and I said, "What? That book?"

She said, "Yes."

I said, "Don't tell me it's not really sold! That's a book I wanted to get rid of." [Laughter] "We've had it too long." I was really quite annoyed.

At any rate, I got a job at Publishers' Weekly, a temporary job, and thereby missed out on a job at Harper's in the production department. I could have gotten into publishing. My whole life might have changed.

Miss Kirkus sent me a letter, she said, and I never got it. After two weeks, she didn't hear anything. She went over to Macy's to ask me about it and heard I'd gone to work at the Publisher's Weekly, and just thought I didn't care. Of course, I was sick when I found out that. But it was too late. The job had been filled. That was really my chance to get into publishing.

But I didn't like New York and I don't think I would have been happy living there. But who knows? My whole life might have been different.

Maguire: You went to New York with the idea of settling there?

Hawkins: Oh, yes. I was going to be a children's editor. But I actually

Hawkins: didn't like living in New York. It's an experience that I certainly don't regret. I'm glad that I had the experience, but I'm not a city person. I had to see trees and flowers. In fact, the only thing that kept my sanity, I think, was that when I was going to work, I rode a bus that went past the Central Park and the Metropolitan Museum, and in the spring you could see flowering trees. I read Thoreau's Walden Pond, which kept me sane. [Chuckles]

In the fall of 1929, the crash came. I went to work in Minnesota for Mabel Ulrich. She had a bookshop in St. Paul and another one in Rochester, Minnesota where the Mayo Clinic is. I stayed there for the fall months till Christmas. I let myself in for an absolutely absurd situation. It couldn't have been more stupid of me.

Dr. Mabel Ulrich said that she wanted me to become the manager of this shop. The girl who was there managing it wasn't doing a very good job. But she didn't want to fire this girl. I was to go down and manage it without her knowing I was managing.

Maguire: How could you have done that?

Hawkins: Imagine my being stupid enough to think I could do it.

Maguire: It must have been a challenge, though. I mean you must have thought it would be a challenge to be a manager.

Hawkins: Challenge!? Nobody can manage when there's another manager. You just can't do it. It was an interesting experience, and I met Dr. Walter Alvarez, who was one of the most delightful human beings I've ever run into.

One of the really warm things I remember about Rochester, Minnesota was his coming in just before Christmas. I was going to spend it with my cousin in St. Paul. He said, "Mrs. Alvarez and I don't know what your plans for Christmas are, but if you're going to be alone in Rochester, we'd love to have you come and spend the day with us," which I thought was so sweet. It really influenced me, so that in later years I always tried, if I could, to invite somebody who might be alone on Christmas.

At any rate, I went back, spent Christmas with my cousin, and then went to New York again. I worked for the Spring Announcement* of the Publishers' Weekly and also put book plates in books for the White House library that was just being devised that year. Frederic Melcher, who was head of the Publishers' Weekly, was responsible for that, and he hired me himself to put these book plates in.

*Publishers' Weekly, in conjunction with Baker and Taylor, issue each spring and fall announcements of forthcoming books.

Hawkins: It was very, very nice. He knew I didn't have a job and so--

Maguire: How did you meet him?

Hawkins: I went into the Publishers' Weekly. I had worked for them before. In fact, I guess I just met him at the PW. It was a small firm at that time. I went in and said that I couldn't stand Macy's any longer. He knew Sather Gate Book Shop and he knew Mr. Sommer, you see. So he said, "I can only offer you a temporary job." He had me work on the fall announcement under Jessie Moore.

Then he hired me to work on the library directory. It was a national directory of libraries of the whole United States [American Library Directory, New York: R.R. Bowker]. I worked on that. He sent out a questionnaire to all the libraries, wanted to know what their income was and all kinds of other information. I worked on assembling that for a couple of months. By September 1930, I decided to go back west.

Maguire: I had wanted to backtrack just a bit and get the reasons that you decided to come to New York in the first place. You must have learned quite a bit at Sather Gate to feel that you were ready to go into children's editing.

Hawkins: I really, of course, didn't know that much, but I thought I did. I think that somewhere along the line I got the idea that I wanted to select children's books. I really wasn't equipped to do it. If I'd gone there and gotten a job and been taught, which I might have--I knew Margaret Lesser--who had come from Washington state and who knew friends of mine--asked me if I would care to work in the detective stories department at Doubleday, a job she might be able to get me. I said, "I don't know anything about detective stories." It was so stupid of me. I should have gone to work for her, you see. She later became the children's editor at Doubleday.

I was a very stupid girl. I never took what opportunities were there. Obviously I wasn't supposed to be in New York. That's obvious. Otherwise I would have grabbed onto it. I really think it's because I loved living out here that I went back to the West Coast. I went up to Yakima, where my family was, and I worked in Yakima Book and Stationery which was owned by Graham's. I ran that for about six months, and then I got a job in Lowman and Hanford's in Seattle. I worked in there for about two weeks. I got a telephone call from Mrs. Mitchell asking me if I would come back to them. That was in 1931, so I had worked for, I guess, more than six months at Yakima Book and Stationery.

I didn't do a very good job there. I think what it taught me mostly was what I didn't know, that I thought I knew so much and I

Hawkins: found I knew so little. Most of my life has been discovering what I don't know. [Chuckle]

Back in Berkeley

Hawkins: Well, to get back to Sather Gate Book Shop. [Chuckling] I have now come back to the fall of 1931, and [am] working in the children's department.

Maguire: And you were happy to get that job.

Hawkins: Oh, I was delighted! Mrs. Mitchell was a great favorite of mine. In fact she gave me such a high recommendation to Mabel Ulrich that that's how I got the job. Dr. Ulrich said, "I never saw such a recommendation." She was very disappointed in me. [Chuckling] Mabel Ulrich's shop wasn't the right place, that's all.

Maguire: When you returned to Sather Gate Book Shop, were the same people staffing the sales department? Who was working there?

Hawkins: When I first went to work for the shop I remember, besides Constance Mitchell, of course, Mr. Sommer, and Catherine Jane Herbert who was office manager and in charge of most hiring and firing. I liked her, but I seemed to find it very hard to persuade her to give me supplies--this was when I was in charge.

One day she said, "Darlin', I don't know why it is, but when you ask me for something, you always put my back up."

I thought it over and decided the trouble was that I always asked for something like a pencil, directly, and she liked to be oblique. I decided to try a new tack. I'd come up to the office and approach Catherine Jane like this, "Are you in a good mood, Mrs. Herbert?"

"What do you want?" she'd ask.

"Oh, I won't ask until I know you're in a good mood," or perhaps I'd say, "Have you had your lunch, yet?"

"What do you want?"

I'd delay in a joking way and then ask her for a new pencil.

"Oh, is that all?" she'd say, and hand me the pencil without a murmur.

Hawkins: It worked every time. She thought I was building up to ask the impossible.

The buyer for adult books, when I first came was Anne Hegerty, and I sold fiction, as I think I said earlier, so occasionally our paths crossed. She handled the selling for the wholesale, but on the floor selling the adult books were John Thomas--we called him Tommy-- and William Garrett whom we called Bill. Each had his own particular following of customers who would have no other clerk wait on them. There may have been others then, but I don't remember. When I returned in 1931 there were some changes. Alice Mellow became buyer of adult books about the same time I became buyer for the children's books.

I'll have to explain that a bit. Anne Hegerty left to get married and I believe that was when Mrs. Mitchell became buyer for the whole shop. Her husband, Mr. Mitchell, I can't remember his first name, sold books wholesale, calling on libraries and taking orders.

I don't remember just when it was that he left Sather Gate to go into competition with Sather Gate Book Shop and sell to libraries himself. Anyway, some time after he left, Mrs. Mitchell left too, and Alice Mellow became buyer. She was one of the best things to happen to the shop. She told me she had been working for Mrs. Herbert in the office. She had worked years before, in the stationery, between 1920 and 1924. I came to work in 1926, and in the spring of 1929, I went East. Alice came back to Sather Gate Book Shop in the fall of 1929, so we didn't meet until I returned in 1931. She had returned to work to help put her husband through dental school.

She was an excellent buyer, and a great favorite with all the salesmen. Although she retired about 1943, she is still friends with some of the salesmen, also retired, as I am. When she retired the salesmen gave her a farewell dinner and presented her with a silver platter. It's hard to describe the oh, what's the word--the general good feeling between the salesmen of the better publishers. Most of them were intelligent and educated men and buyers. Not all, of course--there were some I didn't like, but most were not just "drummers" as salesmen were sometimes called. There are a couple of funny stories told about Alice. I remember once she leaned over the balcony to ask Bill Garrett if we had a certain book a customer had phoned about entitled Fun In Bed, and quite unconsciously she called, "Bill, do we have Fun In Bed?" and remembering she had seen one jacketless, added, "Without a jacket?" I can't tell you how many times people have repeated the joke to me, generally attributed to John Thomas--he was a somewhat prissy man--and Miss Florence Lutz--she was a very severe looking woman who wore pince-nez on a long,

Hawkins: black cord and wrote a book on theatrical gestures, I think it was-- I can't quite remember, but they almost always forgot the punchline-- at least what I think is the really funny part--Alice's asking so seriously, "Without a jacket?" Miss Lutz worked for us for a while, selling books in the adult department.

Maguire: So Mrs. Mitchell was buyer for the whole shop for a while?

Hawkins: Yes, I had almost forgotten that. It is all so long ago.

Then Mr. Mitchell, who was working for Sather Gate too, left and set up a bookstore of his own--to sell to schools and libraries-- in direct competition. Mrs. Mitchell was working for Sather Gate, and she said to me that she knew she'd have to quit if her husband continued this, even though she didn't feel that it was a conflict of interest as far as she herself was concerned. But she did leave, and I took over as head of the department. That was in 1934.

Maguire: At this time, and not until 1934, did you do the buying?

Hawkins: Not until 1934.

Maguire: So you were in those years, from '31 to '34, doing essentially what you had done.

Hawkins: Yes, yes. I learned more and more as I got to know some of the librarians who came in. I did all the stock work and the marking of books. For a long time Sather Gate didn't mark books at all.

Maguire: Oh, they didn't do this at Sather Gate?

Hawkins: No. I'd come from a place where every book was cost-marked, and I couldn't understand it. But finally they decided they had to know how old a book was, how long they'd had that particular copy. So they marked them with a code mark for a year and a month. The first year was A-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, up to 12. You'd know that they'd had it in say, 1934; it was bought in that year. The next year was B. It would be 1935. So if you had a book that was older than that, that wasn't marked, you'd know that you'd had it longer. But they never did cost-mark the books, and I think that it was unfortunate because when you took inventory you really couldn't take down what it cost. You had to sort of guess.

Oh, I almost forgot. When I first came to Sather Gate and discovered they too, like Graham's, sold books at wholesale, I was surprised to find what a low discount Sather Gate gave in comparison with Graham's. Their discount was generally twenty-five percent off list price. Sather Gate Book Shop gave only fifteen percent discount, and that seemed low. But I guess Graham's might have had a lower discount

Hawkins: I didn't know about, and besides they cost-marked their books and Sather Gate didn't, so I guess they didn't dare give a bigger discount.

I remember a time--I guess it wasn't long before I went to the University Press, when a county library asked us to give them twenty-five percent discount and said they could promise us ten thousand dollars a year's business. And the powers that be refused. Looking back, I think it was a mistake, and I thought so at the time.

Routine Duties

Maguire: What was the routine work like? Was there a lot of just paperwork to catch up on?

Hawkins: The head of the department did the ordering and had a certain amount of paperwork, but they had an office for us, for most of the things. The actual ordering sent to the publishers was done upstairs. You would mark your catalog--the publishers would send us catalogs and because we had both retail and wholesale--it was all one--orders would come in from the libraries. We didn't do much school business in those days. We did mostly public libraries because school libraries were not yet developed, and we didn't sell textbooks at all. But we did have a very wide selection because of the fact that we did sell to libraries. We could carry stock that the ordinary bookstore couldn't carry because we knew we could sell it to the library, and if we sold it retail too, that was so much the better.

[end tape 1, side 2; begin tape 2, side 1]

We sold books to the county libraries, big and small, and to most of the city libraries north of the Tehachapi Mountains. Vroman's sold books to the libraries in southern California.

Mrs. Mitchell, while she was there, would fill the wholesale orders and I'd take care of the retail customers. There were just the two of us. If she weren't busy ordering, she might wait on the customers. But I mostly waited on the retail customers.

Maguire: Who else did you have on the staff?

Hawkins: In the children's department at that time, before she bought for the whole shop, there were just the two of us, and at Christmas time we'd get in extra help, maybe one or two extra people for the Christmas season. We'd get somebody in between the first and middle of October.

Maguire: Oh, that early?

Hawkins: Yes, they'd stay until Christmas, and sometimes until after inventory.

Hawkins: We took inventory between Christmas and New Year's. Mrs. Mitchell did the ordering, mostly from the salesmen. They called on us about four times a year. Special orders and stock we'd sold out but needed before the salesmen came back were ordered on slips that were sent upstairs to the office, where the order clerk would assemble the different orders by publisher and hold them until we had enough to give us a regular discount, and then order the books.

When books arrived they were unpacked by Benny, Mr. Bennet our packing and shipping clerk, and the books would be priced from the invoices. We did get around to marking an "n" to indicate a short-discount book finally, as well as the coded month and year the book was received. Then the books would be loaded in steel trucks, and we would unload them and put them up on the shelves where they belonged. My job was to see that the books were put away as soon as possible. I also made displays of new books.

Until 1940, we were where Sproul Hall is (the administration center on campus), which was then Telegraph Avenue and now part of the plaza. We had a basement where the books were unpacked and were kept in bins. We had an upstairs balcony where the office force was. In back of the balcony was a great big sort of an auditorium. For quite awhile it was a warehouse for Oxford University Press. They had a woman there who handled it. It was a depository for stock, for Oxford University Press for the West Coast.

I remember, one time I had a Book Week celebration there. It was really quite an exciting one. I had two different authors speak every day for a whole week. I remember I had Inglis Fletcher one time. She was a person whom I had known long years before in Spokane. She sold her first book when she was living in San Francisco, a children's book called The White Leopard.

I asked Agnes Danforth Hewes, and I had Howard Pease and Hildegarde Hawthorne. Oh, a number of other authors. Unfortunately, I don't have the little card that I sent out inviting customers to come. We had a crowd every day. It was very satisfactory and worked out fine. I didn't do it every year, however.

We had some very, very faithful customers. Unfortunately, some of the ones who were the most book-minded were also the poorest and couldn't afford to buy as many books as they'd like, or else their eyes were bigger than their stomachs and they would buy too many. It would take them all year to pay off what they bought at Christmas time. I always felt sad because they were such nice people. [Chuckle] We weren't allowed to charge to certain ones if their bills were too far behind. But no interest was charged on their bills.

Hawkins: I did counting of stock for Mrs. Mitchell for her ordering. When the salesman, for instance, for Lippincott would come in, she would give me a full Lippincott catalog, and I would count all the books that we had of theirs. She would see what we had; then she would decide how many she wanted and mark the catalog. The salesman would come in and take the order off the catalog, and then he'd sell her the new books. When I came in, I was always very delighted to see what books were coming in. [Laughing] It was lots of fun.

Maguire: So you were learning all the time about how to do the wholesaling, how to do the ordering and buying.

Hawkins: Right. We had five big tables that we used for display. I remember one time the Buffs [Mary and Conrad Buff] had a book, Dancing Cloud, that had pictures that I really didn't care for. It had pictures that were in lithographs and I didn't like the color combination. The publishers sent the originals out for display. I set that up for a whole month right in front of my desk. I thought, "Oh dear, I won't enjoy this, looking at this for a whole month." But, you know, at the end of the month I was crazy about the book. [Laughter] It was a really very beautiful, an Indian book.

Maguire: Did you have a large space in the window to display children's books in?

Hawkins: We had two large windows there, and always there was some room for a few children's books. But the children's books didn't get displayed except during Book Week. Then they usually did. I remember one Book Week, Mrs. Mitchell let me do the window, and it was one of the most awful windows I've ever seen in my life. She never criticized you because she realized you had sense and you'd see yourself that it was stupid, [laughing] and I did. I never again asked to do any windows.

We had a man one time, though, who was a salesman in the adult department. His name was Clyde Desain. He had worked at Breuner's [furniture store] doing display work. He did very, very fine display work. I remember--this was just about the time that Mrs. Atherton Eyre--Katherine Wigmore Eyre--her first book had come out called Lottie's Valentine, very delightful pictures. He made copies and set up one of the prettiest windows I have ever seen for a valentine window. It was just delightful. Every once in awhile, we had someone who was very gifted in that way, and we'd have very special windows. But this didn't happen all the time.

Anyway, in 1934 Mrs. Mitchell left and I took over the buying of the children's books, which I did until 1954. I was the buyer for the whole shop about a year, I think, before I went to work for the University of California Press. It's hard for me to remember exactly, but I was a buyer for about a year before I left. But I don't remember dates exactly.

Maguire: Buyer for the entire store?

Hawkins: For the entire store, yes.

Maguire: Rather than just the children's department.

Hawkins: Yes. At that time Miss Jeanne-Marie Lee had come to work for me. She did the buying, really, for the juveniles. I let her do all the stock buying, and she sat in on the buying of the children's books.

In those days, in the early days, Sather Gate Book Shop was very solvent and had nearly all the business in northern California in the libraries. But the serpent entered Eden [laughing] in the form of something called the "Personal Book Shop," which later on became--oh dear, I can't remember the name; I'll remember it later; I'll tell you what it is when I do--a Boston firm. I remember now, Campbell and Hall. They sold at much higher discounts than we could afford.

What they did was to take books that they had used in their circulating libraries--they had many circulating libraries--and they'd run them through for a short time, and then they'd sell them at forty percent discount to the libraries. Of course, the libraries were delighted. It really did play havoc.

Then Baker and Taylor began to come in. The eastern firms, you see, had not been selling in California. Now it's a jungle. I am glad I'm not in the business anymore. It's dog eat dog. In those days it was sort of understood that Vroman's took care of southern California and Sather Gate Book Shop took care of northern California. They gave good service. Everyone got books quickly.

Ordering From Publishers, Discounting

Hawkins: For instance, in those days, today's orders would be pulled today. Whatever orders came in in the morning were filled, and the books would be billed the same afternoon and be sent out in the afternoon mail, and the books not in stock would be ordered the next day. Well, when Vroman's closed, it was sometimes more than a month before the books got to the customer.

Maguire: A month?

Hawkins: Yes. Sometimes more.

Maguire: Would that be worth the discount? Waiting that long would be worth the discount?

Hawkins: It was a question of the length of time it took to get the orders, because we had so many more orders, you see. In those earlier days, there weren't that many libraries, and you got your books very promptly. And in those days you could get your books from the publishers right away. You'd order books, and in two weeks you'd have your books from the publishers. Now you get your invoices before you get your books, and before you get your books unpacked, your invoices are due.

Maguire: When you first started working with Sather Gate, what kind of reputation did it have?

Hawkins: It had a wonderful reputation. It had a reputation of integrity, which it really had. Its discounts were based on the discounts we got from the publishers. There was no hanky-panky. If we got a short discount, we gave a short discount. If we got a big discount, we gave as big a discount as we could. We gave twenty-five percent discount on books that we got at forty percent discount. And we paid the postage. Nowadays, everybody pays his own postage.

It was a different sort of set up too. You bought your books, usually, in January and July for the season. They were yours, no returns. But the publishers began to want to sell more new books, so they would arrange to take back what you didn't sell. It became so that you didn't have the same push, perhaps, to get the things sold.

The whole set up was different. As I say, you had a different payment schedule. For instance, when I worked at Graham's you ordered books July 1, and they were sent to you as they came out. But your main stock for Christmas came--that is your back stock--came immediately. But you didn't pay for it until January 10.

Maguire: Oh, that's a pretty long interval.

Hawkins: Because that gave you time-- Well, it got the books off the publishers' shelves. It cost rent, as it were, for the shelves. Waiting for the money was paying rent for the shelves. Publishers didn't have to have such a big inventory in their own warehouses. And what you ordered were your books permanently. Publishers didn't have to worry about them ever coming back.

Maguire: That was your problem.

Hawkins: That was my-- Yes, it was the problem of the bookseller. They gave you till Christmas because Christmas was the time when you sold most of your books, you see. That was the big time. Of course, when you were selling to libraries you were not doing this. Also, this changed. After I came to Sather Gate, such later payments were allowed only on certain orders, large stock orders. It wasn't on

Hawkins: everything, because I remember, if you had your books paid for by the tenth of the month following the date of your bill, you got an additional ten percent discount, so that it paid you to discount your bills. We always discounted our bills in the early days, always. It was only in later years that--after Vroman's went out of business--the roof fell in because we had too much business. Everybody down south knew us, and they sent us all the business. This happened while I was working for the Press [University of California Press], so I wasn't there at the time this happened. But the roof fell in really, because Sather Gate Book Shop wasn't funded enough for such a big operation and they weren't prepared for it. You can't grow that fast and cope with it.

Maguire: I would imagine that Sather Gate must have had a pretty large storage area. The books would come in, and you would have to put them somewhere before you had them all marked and organized.

Hawkins: Yes, yes. And, of course, we moved. When the university built Sproul Hall we had to move a block south on Telegraph Avenue. Nineteen forty, I think it was that we moved. We moved down next door to the location that is now the Bank of America which later made us move again, to make room for expansion. The last move of the retail store was on Durant between Dana and Telegraph.

Hawkins: The whole block was changed. We were between Bancroft Way and the university originally. Then we were between Bancroft Way and Durant on the same side of the street. But we had a much smaller store. Years later, when our volume grew so in wholesale, we had to move the wholesale away from the retail store. In about 1962 I guess it was, we moved the wholesale to San Pablo Avenue near Albany. We were there for just a few months and then we moved down to Emeryville and a great, big warehouse there. We were full. We had a tremendous number of books. We had an inventory of over one million dollars. It's terrific the amount of money that has to be available for bookstores.

Maguire: Now, most of that would, I imagine, be in the wholesale side of the business rather than the retail.

Hawkins: Oh yes, that was the wholesale. The retail was always good. We always had good sales. It would still be in existence today if they had separated the wholesale and the retail completely--as two complete, separate organizations. But the retail store was tied to the wholesale. When the wholesale went out of business with five years to run on the warehouse lease that we had (and they never were able to rent the warehouse; that money for the lease was just thrown away every month), it just pulled them down. It was just a shame.

The Children's Department

Maguire: To get back to the earlier days at Sather Gate. Now, you have just been made the head of the children's department. I was going to ask a little bit about who was there then and what you began to do that you hadn't done before as head of the children's department, and how you felt about it.

Hawkins: Mrs. Mitchell had said, of course, that I would take over the head position. It's curious because business was extremely poor at that time when Mrs. Mitchell left, so poor that I was alone in the department, completely alone. I didn't have anybody to relieve me at lunch. Somebody had to come back there if anybody came in for quite a while.

I remember during the depression--this was earlier--there were days when we didn't take in any money at all, any cash. We might have had a few charges. I remember one time we took in \$1.50 in cash. Another time we took in \$1.75. Another time \$2.50. We did have, as I say, a few charges, so that maybe the day of children's books sales, not counting the wholesale but just the retail, would be something like maybe twenty-five dollars or thirty-five dollars at the most.

Maguire: So the store was staying alive on the wholesale.

Hawkins: It was staying alive on the wholesale in those days.

Sather Gate's Staff

Hawkins: I don't think I did very much differently from what Mrs. Mitchell had trained me because, I had thought that what she had done was so good, and I liked the way she handled things. For instance, when we did get somebody to work--we had one drawer for cash. There wasn't a separate drawer for each of us. There were separate drawers for the adult department, but not in the children's department. But it had several books to write sales up. You picked up whatever book was handy that wasn't being written in. Nobody's book was anybody's specific book. I remember Jeanne-Marie [Lee], when she was working for me, suggested that maybe it would be a good idea if we, each of us, had our own book.

I said, "No, Jeanne-Marie. The reason I have it the way it is is because, if you notice, we all work together very nicely. We all help each other. If it is time for somebody to go out to lunch the other person will take over and finish the sale, write it up, wrap the books up, and nobody's feelings are hurt. There's no feeling at all that it's

Hawkins: your sale. What everybody's trying to do is help everybody else." I said, "If you're busy and someone else isn't, that person will come up and help you wrap up the books if you're wrapping them as a gift." There was always this feeling. I said, "Now the minute we take a separate book, no matter how you try--nobody gets any commission, so there's no reason to know how much everybody does. I know who's doing selling and whether they are or they aren't. But upstairs they don't know. Sooner or later they'll start adding up. "'Oh, so-and-so has this many sales, and this one doesn't have that many sales'." Well, maybe so-and-so had, because she had taken this sale that was somebody else's, not thinking that it made any difference because it shouldn't. I said, "Before long people are going to begin comparing. The way it is now everyone is trying as hard as she can. You are all friends and I want it to stay that way."

She said, "I never thought of it in those terms."

But that was the way I felt, that I wanted my department to be a whole department. It didn't matter. Sometimes there was only one or two people, but sometimes there would be four or five. Christmas time there were more salespeople. Sometimes we had as many as four or five people at Christmas.

Maguire: Just in the children's department?

Hawkins: In the children's department, yes. Oh, I wouldn't say five; four maybe and possibly only three.

I remember one time there was a girl named Claris, and a girl named Beth and Jeanne-Marie. Jeanne-Marie and Claris were both excellent salespeople. But neither of them read a great many children's books. I did everything I could think of to get them to know the contents of the children's books. Oh, they knew all about the books. They read reviews. But I never felt that you really and truly could sell books as well if you just knew about them as you did if you actually knew what was inside them.

Beth came. Her name was Beth McGahen. She was a young thing, but Beth was a reader. She read like mad. She would start discussing--this was when I was the buyer of the whole shop. Here was Jeanne-Marie, and here was [chuckling] Claris. They were put to it because Beth said, "How can you discuss books if you haven't read them?" They were all reading like mad, and I laughed! I got such a kick out of that! [Laughter] I couldn't make them read, but she could. They were discussing books right and left. I was just tickled to death. [Laughter] Oh, dear.

I remember one time at Christmas time we had a girl that was married to a man who had a Russian name. She had a little girl. She was one of the quickest, smartest salesgirls I ever saw, but she only

Hawkins: stayed a very short time. This was quite a while before Jeanne-Marie came to work for me.

Then, of course, Sara Jencks worked a while. Also Renee. I think Renee Ashlock (her name is Kennedy now) was responsible for one of the funniest things that happened to me. Mrs. [Carolyn] Kahn, who was the wife of Fred Kahn, who at that time owned Sather Gate Book Shop, said to me, "Is the little girl that you have working for Christmas pregnant?"

I said, "I don't think so. At least she has not told me that she was pregnant."

"Well," she said, "you know, I just think she is pregnant. Do you think she'll get through the Christmas season?"

I said, "She's not said a word about it, so I don't know."

Well, that evening I took Renee home. She said, "Quail, I have a confession to make. I think that I am pregnant."

I said, "Well?"

She said, "I just found out."

I said, "Well, Renee, how far along are you?"

She said, "Well, the doctor thinks about five months."

I said, "Renee, five months? How come you didn't know before?"

She said, "You know, Rex and I were in Arizona, and when we came back I didn't have my period and I went to the doctor, and he said that it might be change of climate but that if it persisted to come back. But I didn't like him so I didn't go back."

I said, "How did you discover it?"

She said, "I was going to be matron of honor at a wedding of a friend of mine and I went down to buy a dress for it and I found I couldn't fit into the size dress I always wore. So I bought a tight girdle and got into it. At the ceremony I fainted."

I said, "Did that tell you?"

She said, "No, I thought it was because I had sunburned my feet. I went to the doctor and he told me I was pregnant." So, she was pregnant! [Laughter] Mrs. Kahn was right. But Renee got through all right. It was only a couple of months. But I've often laughed

Hawkins: about that, her naivete.

Maguire: How was the staff hired? What were the qualities that one looked for?

Hawkins: Mrs. Catherine [Jane] Herbert always hired the girls for the most part. She was in the office and she was the secretary of the firm. If you ever talk to Jeanne-Marie, she'll tell you that Mrs. Herbert said, "Now darlin', do you think you're strong enough?" [Laughter] Of course, Jeanne-Marie is stronger than anybody. She'd never had a sick day.

But before that, during the war, there was a girl named Ede Atmore that came to work for me whom I hired. She came in several times and was interested in the children's books and showed such intelligent response to the children's books. She came in day after day and looked at them. I was desperate because I hadn't been able to get anybody to come and work for me, and Christmas was coming and I was absolutely at my wit's end.

So, I said to her, "Shall we go out and have a cup of coffee?" She said okay and we went out and had a cup of coffee. I said, "Would you consider working for us for Christmas season?" She said, "Yes, I would." She said, "I am waiting for my husband to come back from overseas." He was in the Red Cross. She said, "I haven't anything to do. I'd love to." She was a very intelligent person, very superior, and was an excellent salesperson. She worked just for the Christmas season.

Then I had another very nice woman. Trouble is I can't remember them in sequence. But she also worked during the war. Her name was Mrs. Potter, very charming little woman. She worked not just at Christmas time. She worked for me for quite a little while.

But after--I don't know what year it was, 1935 or 1936--somewhere along there I was the only person in the department, as I was telling you. Mrs. Kahn came in one day and she said, "How do you manage?" I said, "I don't. When I'm gone if a customer comes in it's just too bad. I wish you'd come in." And so she did.

Maguire: Oh, she did and helped you?

Hawkins: She came in and she worked in the children's department for three or four months. Then she went up and worked in the adult department. She was the smartest person that I ever had work for me. I was afraid to have my boss's wife work for me, you know. But she was marvelous. She said, "Now don't worry about it. You just tell me what to do and I'll do it." I never had to tell her more than once about anything. She would pick it up just like that.

Maguire: This was her first job in a bookstore?

Hawkins: I don't know. It was her first job in the store, but I don't know whether she worked before she was married. But she was just brilliant. She really was terribly smart. I just hated to have her go.

[end tape 2, side 1; end interview]

CHAPTER II

[Interview 2: March 2, 1978]
[begin tape 1, side 1]

East Coast vs. West Coast

Maguire: Before we go on, I'd like to go back and ask you to expand on a few things that you discussed in the last session. I was very interested in knowing about your feelings when you came back from New York to California. It seems as though all the activities in the children's literature world had been centered in New York, but you didn't like New York. Now you were on your way back to California; what were your plans and feelings?

Hawkins: I came back to California and was absolutely delighted to find the warmth of the western person, as opposed to the coldness of the New Yorker. It was very, very marked in those days. Now that we have so much cross-country travel, and so many people have come to California from the East, it's not quite the same, but it was extremely different in 1930, when I came back. I was really very touched and delighted to be here.

Then I went home to Yakima because I didn't have a job. I now think that I really was awfully hard on my poor father. I sent my trunk up by express, and it cost him thirty-five dollars to take me out of hock. Things like that. It was unthinking. I was young, but not so young that I might have been excused for doing things like that. I should have been more aware, but I really wasn't.

Maguire: Did you check into the Sather Gate Book Shop when you were in the Bay Area?

Hawkins: No, I don't think I did. I don't remember, to tell you the truth. I may have. If I did, they must have said that there wasn't any job at the time, and they would let me know if there ever was one. I drove up with some friends of the family who were going up to Yakima. And

Hawkins: I remember--this was in November of 1930--driving through Oregon, I thought to myself what a beautiful state it was, even in November when it was dreary, cold weather. The state was still beautiful. The countryside was lovely and green. Of course, that was the western area. We didn't go on the eastern, which is quite deserty.

Then my family welcomed me home. It was, of course, right smack in the depression, but at that time my father still had a job. It was in 1932 that things really got bad. At the time, I got a job for a small sum--probably eighty dollars or ninety dollars a month, maybe one hundred dollars, I've forgotten--with the Yakima Book and Stationery, which was owned by John W. Graham, the company I'd worked for originally, you see.

I didn't plan to stay in Yakima permanently. My mother was working in Seattle about this time. She was working on a newspaper--the P.I., the Post Intelligencer--and I visited her there. I got a job at Lowman and Hanford, which was a bookstore in Seattle, somewhat like Graham's and somewhat like Sather Gate; that is, it did wholesale and retail. I worked for them just about two weeks when Mrs. Mitchell called me, and of course, I just jumped at the chance to go back.

It was curious though. When I got back, the place I had lived in before was rented, and some friends of mine, Marie Richardson and her family, asked me if I'd like to have a room in their home. Marie's father had died just a short time before. I lived in the Richardson household for, I guess, a little over a year.

Maguire: So this is back in Berkeley, then.

Hawkins: Yes, I'm back in Berkeley now. That's in the fall of 1931. I stayed with them for about a year, and then I got my little garden cottage back and lived in it. That was on Arch Street, the same block that the Richardsons lived in.

Illness

Hawkins: In the meantime, I had been working, and in those days, the depression was being felt. We worked for sixteen dollars a week, six days a week. My rent was twenty-five dollars a month. This went on for quite some time. I remember being perfectly able to live comfortably on sixteen dollars a week.

When I was about twenty-seven, I became ill, and I thought I was losing my mind. A friend of mine who was a customer of mine at Sather Gate Book Shop--I'd met her originally there, and then later on had met

Hawkins: her through some friends of mine at a party and we had become very good friends--insisted on taking me to her doctor, who was an endocrinologist, Doctor Lisser. He turned me over to his assistant, Doctor Shepherdson, who discovered that I had a lack of thyroid. I took thyroid from then on until just this year, and I'm back on a minute amount.

But it was like a miracle, truly, because I had not been able to concentrate at all. I really thought I was going crazy because I couldn't converse with anybody. I couldn't keep my mind on what I was doing.

Maguire: Were there any other effects that made you think that maybe it was a physical problem?

Hawkins: Yes. Little scraps of nursery rhyme would run through my head when I was talking to somebody, or little things would divert me. And I'd sleep heavily at night and wake up in the morning as tired as when I went to bed. I was cold all the time. In fact, I'd been cold ever since I was a child. Apparently, this was something of long standing. There was always a joke at home that if you missed your blankets on your bed, all you had to do was look on Quail's bed and you'd find it. Mother was always saying, "Why do you wear so many clothes?" She always would say that. "Take off some! You don't have to wear all those clothes."

And I'd say, "Yes, I do." But it never occurred to any of us that that was what was the matter. But once I took thyroid, I began to perk up, and my energy came back and everything was fine.

Food Prices, 1930s

Hawkins: In those days, food was so reasonable. I used to allow myself ten cents per serving for meat. You could get a lamb chop for ten cents. For forty cents, you could get enough for four people. That was during 1935 and 1936, when mother came down. My father died in 1935, and Mother and three of my brothers, for a while, came to live with me. Then is when I moved from Arch Street down to Virginia Street. I paid \$27.50 a month for a six room house. It was during the time I was at Virginia Street that I met "Mrs. Pink Ink."

Maguire: Now you had mentioned that Mr. Kahn came to the store...

Hawkins: He came to the store before that. He came to the store about 1928. He and a man named Sidney Lee joined Mr. Sommer--they were both young men. Mr. Lee went into the stationery department and Mr. Kahn was in the books. I think at that time that Mr. Sommer made a corporation

Hawkins: instead of just having his own shop.

Maguire: Were there other changes in the bookstore as far as the employees and the types of books and so forth went?

Hawkins: Well, no. There were new employees, of course, but the types of books were the same. We serviced most of the public libraries in northern California, I would say. But we did practically no work with schools because there were few school libraries in those days. The libraries were nearly all public.

As I said in my last session, our stock was extremely complete because of the fact that we would constantly have replacement orders for standard children's books, the classics and popular modern books. And we would have the new books because the libraries would buy recommended new books.

Of course, I didn't buy until 1934, but Mrs. Mitchell did talk with me about the books. And I knew how much she bought because I put them away and sold them and pulled orders sometimes. She let me pull orders when she was busy, but mostly she did the wholesale orders. I took care of the retail and putting away the stock.

Arrangement of Stock

Hawkins: You wanted to know a little bit about how the stock was arranged and things of that sort?

Maguire: Yes.

Hawkins: We kept all our books for sale on shelves on the main floor, but we had stockroom stock which was arranged by publisher. On the main floor the books were by subject, and under subject by author. This was, of course, very much the way libraries were run.

Maguire: Was it a standard subject classification, or was it something that the store devised?

Hawkins: Well, we just used our own classification. For instance, in the children's department we used to keep all our fiction together. I remember that it was a big decision when we decided to put our animal books together. We put two sections: we put all our animal fiction stories in one section and our natural history non-fiction in another. But they were in the same area, because we had so many calls for animal stories.

Hawkins: And we kept our classics series by series. There were, at that time, oh, more than half a dozen very attractive series, like the Scribner Classics and the Lippincott Classics, and the Washington Square Classics and the Windemere series, and the Louis Rhead series. All of these were different collections of classics. The only one that still exists, I think, is the Scribner Classics, and I think they're going out of print now, if I'm not mistaken. But in those days, they were really very popular and we sold many of them.

Then we had fiction, straight fiction. Then I had a section of non-fiction, which was biography and history, and poetry and religion, and picture books, and others I can't remember. We'd keep those separated. I'd keep the biographies together. Usually, as I recall, we kept it straight by author, not by person who was being written about. Because I knew what all the books were, and all I had to do was go to the biography section and pull it out. We had a large quantity of fiction. And picture books we kept on tables, flat.

Maguire: So they could be seen.

Hawkins: Yes. And we would keep new books on tables, flat piles with their faces up. We kept them roughly in alphabetical order by author.

Maguire: Were picture books at that time these large books that you see these days?

Hawkins: Yes, some of them were, and some of them weren't. There weren't as many full color illustrations then, although in the '30s, the new color processes began to develop and we could have a lot more. I remember that Macmillan put out a series of books called the Happy Hours Series--very attractive little square books with colored pictures for the younger children. They sold, at first, for twenty-five and then fifty cents. They really were delightful.

The average price of a book ranged between \$1.00 and, oh, I'd say \$2.50. A three dollar book was usually one with quite a few pictures. Very few books were five dollars. Those were considered very, very expensive.

Maguire: But you mentioned last time you had a leather-bound dictionary..? [See p.12]

Hawkins: Well, that's adult books, you see. And you must remember that was an India paper edition, leather-bound, for thirty-five dollars--a very expensive book.

But often we had tables for display like that in the original store. We would get pictures--originals--from the publishers, and then we'd keep them a few weeks and send them on to someone else.

Hawkins: We had at least two or three tables for display, and then we had two or three tables for the new books to come in.

Selecting Children's Books

Hawkins: There weren't anything like the number of books published each year there are now, and we were able to keep track. We had everything that was good in children's books, but we did not have what we called trash. In other words, we did not carry the Nancy Drew stories; we didn't carry any of the Hardy Boys or the Tom Swift series. Those, we said, they could get at any department store. And they weren't stocked by the libraries, so we just didn't keep them. They took up a great deal of room, and we just didn't have enough room for them.

The Nancy Drew books really are pretty stereotyped. I have no objection to libraries not stocking them, because they were cheap, and they were things that the children spent their own money on. There was no need for the libraries to stock them. They wanted to give them the books that children couldn't afford to buy, the things that the children might not discover otherwise. That's part of their job.

Just as I feel that in school, teachers reading aloud shouldn't read aloud things like the Nancy Drew stories or books that the children will read on their own, but books that they need to have introduced to them that they might like very much--if they got past the first chapter--read aloud to them. In fact, some of the teachers used to do what I suggested, which was to get an interesting book that was hard to get a child into, and then when they got to a very exciting point say, "Well, if you want to finish this, you can get it from the school library."

I remember one time, a librarian said that there was a book about Saint Catherine of Siena (Anne Eaton's Story of The Flame) that was terribly popular, and she couldn't figure out why. She found out that the English teacher had read aloud this book and the children were crazy about it.

Maguire: Did you ever have children asking you for the Nancy Drew books?

Hawkins: Oh yes, quite frequently.

Maguire: What would you say to them?

Hawkins: Well, we always said, "You can get it at a department store. They're down at Capwell's" or Kahn's or whatever department store it might be. All of the department stores carried them; they carried them in full. But they didn't carry anything else. I mean, you have to make a choice somewhere. And as we were supplying libraries--our business was with libraries--it behooved us to have the books that they'd buy. We just didn't have room for everything. We did have the Oz books, however--all of them [laughter].

Maguire: How did you keep up on all these new books that came in? Did you use published aids, like Publishers' Trade List Annual?

Hawkins: Mrs. Mitchell, of course, got the word from the publishers' salesmen. They always showed the books. Then, as soon as the books came in, I was curious and would look at them and would read the ones that attracted me.

Then there was a group of librarians that started up about the time--I don't remember exactly what year it stated. It was called Association of Children's Librarians of Northern California. ACL we called it. This group was started, I remember, by a meeting with Frances Clarke Sayers, who was then doing the job that Mae Durham Roger* is doing now. Several of the librarians in this area--the Oakland Public Library children's librarian, Nanette Morgan, and Rosemary Livsey, who was down in southern California--came up for this. And I was included. I was very much interested that they allowed me to join them because this was a library group. They met once a month and got the publishers to send books out, and then various librarians reviewed them.

I remember one time, one librarian said that a certain book--it was called Bears, Bears, Bears by Ruth Krauss--she said, "Oh, I wish you'd been at the last meeting. They reviewed Bears, Bears, Bears, and they rejected it. I was sure you would have defended it."

And I said, "Well, why didn't you defend it?" [Laughter] Of course, I just loved it. I thought it was a wonderful book. It was done by Ruth Krauss.

I remember, later on I talked at a meeting. I did a great many talks at schools, nursery schools and things. One time, a nursery school asked me to speak and I brought some books. One of the books I brought was by Ruth Krauss, and it was called The Very Special House.

*Mae Durham Roger teaches children's literature and storytelling for the School of Library and Information Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

Hawkins: After I had read it and told them how much I liked it, I finished my speech. I thought I was the only speaker. Then they introduced a Doctor Adler, who was a child specialist, psychiatrist, who was going to talk to the mothers about psychiatry and handling children. I was terrified. I felt I might have made a horrible error, my liking this book. But, Dr. Adler very amusingly said, "Before everybody else gets a chance, I would like to get that book. [Laughter] I think it's a very therapeutic one." Oh, I felt so relieved! [Laughter]

The Children's Book Room

Hawkins: Anyway, to get back to the arrangement of books in the first store on Telegraph, the children's room was very big. We had lots of room for things.

Maguire: You had tables and chairs?

Hawkins: Tables, and we had a big display stand. Oh, it was about as big as this coffee table [about 2 1/2 feet square] and it came up like a pyramid, and I thought this would show off the books very well. They had it made specially for the children's room. I thought after it was done it was a very poor idea, and it didn't work out very well. But there we had it.

Then they had little round tables with little chairs for the children. There were two tables. And we had a few books that were specially on these tables for the children to look at. They were Randolph Caldecott* picture books and things of that sort.

These were for the children, to amuse them while their parents were buying books. And underneath the tables we had stock. Sometimes the books were flat, and sometimes they weren't. But we had a beautiful selection of books.

*The prestigious Caldecott Medal (named for Randolph J. Caldecott, noted British illustrator of books for children) has been awarded since 1938 to the illustrator of the finest children's picture book published in the U.S. during the previous year; it is awarded by the Children's Services Division of the American Library Association.

Maguire: Did you have some hard-to-find books? Books nobody else in the area carried?

Hawkins: Oh well, ninety percent of the books that we carried were not carried anywhere else. We just didn't carry the so-called "flats," they used to call them. They were cheap, garish books--cardboard-bound, mostly, and sold for thirty-nine cents or fifty-nine cents, etc. They weren't really very attractive, and we didn't have to buy any of those. We left those for the department stores. We really had a quality book-store. There's no place like it anywhere in this area now, absolutely none. The people that used to come to Sather Gate say, oh, how they miss it. Miss [Jeanne-Marie] Lee's book department at Hink's [department store in Berkeley] is as close to it as you could come, but that couldn't carry the quantity and quality--the number of titles--because after all, they aren't doing a wholesale business.

A lot of books that we bought would sell only for wholesale. But if an occasional person would ask for it, we would have it for her.

Maguire: And you couldn't have really supported this if you hadn't had the wholesale?

Hawkins: No. The only reason that we were able to have such a complete list of juvenile books was because.... And of course, we didn't call them juvenile books, I hope you understand. Sather Gate's children's book department was called the "Boys' and Girls' Book Room." It was always called that. We didn't call it "juvenile books" or "children's books." It was the "Boys' and Girls' Book Room."

Maguire: I was going to ask you a few more questions about Mr. Kahn. I understand that he wasn't quite the book man that Mr. Sommer was, but he was very big on service.

Hawkins: Yes. Mr. Kahn came in without previous experience in books. He was a young man who had quite a good deal of money. He didn't have to work for a living, but he wanted to be busy and have something to do that was useful. He liked books, but he wasn't a book man in the same sense that Mr. Sommer was. Mr. Sommer was a born book man. Mr. Kahn was a very fine man who did a very good job, and he liked books, but he never had quite the flare that Mr. Sommer had. Mr. Sommer was pretty close to being a genius. There weren't very many booksellers that had his particular ability.

When I came back in 1931, Mr. Lee had gone on to something else and Mr. Kahn was the only one of the two young men still in the business. Of course, after Mr. Sommer died, Mr. Kahn took over as president of the company and stayed with it until he died.

Maguire: Did you keep the stationery department at that time?

Hawkins: Oh, we had the stationery department, yes. I think we had the stationery department until we moved into the very small quarters on Durant, and then they gave it up.

Store Locations

Hawkins: We had two moves during those years. When they enlarged the university for Sproul Plaza and Sproul Hall, we moved down Telegraph Avenue one block. There we had very, very much smaller quarters. We moved there in 1940 and Mr. Sommer had died in 1937.

Maguire: What did you do with all the stock?

Hawkins: Oh, it was a terrible thing. We had no real place to keep our stock. I lost five tables for my children's room. That shows you how little. And I called it "the black hole of Calcutta" because it had no daylight back in that place but a tiny little window above the telephone booth. No, we couldn't keep nearly as many books. We had a small stockroom, but it wasn't anything like as big, not anything like.

Maguire: Were these moves from location to location financially a burden on the store--to transport the books?

Hawkins: Well, our moving of the books from the one Telegraph store to the other Telegraph store, which was a block away, was done with trucks, little hand trucks that we used to bring stock from the stockroom into the main store. We just rolled them down the street, and we did most of that ourselves. So it wasn't that costly, having done it that way. It made it fairly simple. We packed books in boxes, I remember. I also remember that I labelled the boxes with the place they had come from and where they were to go. We would take a whole shelf of books and put them in a labelled box and trundle them down the street, and put the whole box of books into place in the designated shelf in the new shop.

It was funny, because I got two boxes transposed on the shelves, and they were there for about a year before I realized it. Because within the shelf itself, they were alphabetically arranged [laughter] but not when you ran it down to the next one. One day I was running it down, and I saw running over from one shelf to the next that they were wrong and I re-did them the proper way.

Maguire: It sounds like an awful lot of work though.

Hawkins: It was a lot of work and it's not something you do often. But I don't know, it's always costly to move. There's no question about it. But in those days, we were still fairly prosperous. The big burden hadn't fallen on us. After all, it was when Vroman's went out of business that everything happened. And that happened after I left Sather Gate and was working for the [University of California] Press. So that I wasn't there when this thing happened. I just heard about it afterwards.

Working Conditions

Maguire: I was going to ask you about the working conditions.

Hawkins: Well, we worked six days a week for a long time.

[end tape 1, side 1]

That was until Mr. Fred Potter came. He had been in advertising I guess, before World War II, when he was in the service, and he wanted something that was more rewarding to him personally. That's how he happened to come into bookselling, which of course as you know, is a very ill-paid work. After a certain length of time, Mr. Potter felt that we ought to have a five-day week. I remember, there was a great deal of talk about it. The workers were all non-union, of course, and this was the time when there was a lot of organization of unions. Mrs. Herbert was very much opposed to unions, and there was, oh, quite a lot of discussion going on. Also, I might add jobs were not too easy to get. Mr. Potter wanted us to all sign a petition that they put in a five-day week.

Maguire: His position in the store was what at that time?

Hawkins: He was a salesclerk.

Maguire: He was a clerk?

Hawkins: Yes, at that time. I remember that I wouldn't sign it because I was so afraid of losing my job. I was afraid that Mrs. Herbert would be very angry. As a matter of fact, they must have been considering putting in the five-day week because after Mr. Potter put in his petition, they did put the five-day week in. I think they did it because they thought if they didn't, the union might get in [laughter].

At any rate, he was a person who had ideas. He was not afraid to stand up for what he thought was right. But our salaries were very, very meager and never did become good. Mine was particularly poor.

Love of bookselling

Hawkins: But I never was a person that cared more for money than for the pleasure of my work. I literally loved what I did. Every day was fun. There wasn't a day went by that I didn't enjoy it.

I remember one time, I discovered what the bookstore meant to me. Miss Leone Garvey was the children's librarian at Berkeley Public Library and she was in the shop. At the same time a young girl named Nina, whose last name I don't know, and her older brother were in. Nina was a great reader. She was about thirteen. In fact, she was so knowledgeable about books, that I thought that she really might go into books because she reminded me of myself when I was young and reading. And so I introduced her to Miss Garvey, whom she didn't know--she didn't, apparently, go to the library very much--and I said, "Miss Garvey, I think that Nina would make a very good children's librarian."

At which Nina shuddered and said, "Oh, I don't want to be a librarian."

And her brother said, "No. Nina's much too vibrant!"

Miss Garvey laughed afterwards and she said, "There I was feeling so vibrant" [laughter].

I was terribly embarrassed as you can imagine, so I said, "Well, Nina, what do you want to do?"

"Oh," she said. "I want to be an actress."

And I thought to myself, when I was thirteen, that's what I wanted to be. So I said, "Well, Nina, that's just exactly what I wanted to be when I was thirteen. I wanted to be an actress or a missionary."

And she said, "A missionary?"

And I said, "Yes." Then I thought to myself, "Well Quail, you have achieved your ambition. You didn't realize it." But to be a good bookseller of children's books, you have to be both a missionary and an actress because in order to present your book, you have to dramatize it sufficiently so that the customer is intrigued by it. And if you have this missionary zeal to get the very best of books to the children, you're a missionary. So that I was a missionary and I was also an actress.

Hawkins: I remember one time, a customer said to me when I was reading some little part or describing something, "Do you go with the book?"
[Laughter]

Giving Advice on Children's Reading

Maguire: How did you provide guidance to your customers on the books?

Hawkins: Well, we had quite a few patrons who came in regularly, and I got to know them very well. They were mostly charge customers. They were women who really had the interest of their children's reading at heart. After all, you must remember Berkeley was a college town in those days. It wasn't a big city. It really was a college community. Even the people who were not teaching--were not professors--were people of considerable interest in the arts: literature, music, drama, things of that sort. There was a great deal of it going on all the time. The customers would come in, and they usually had read reviews or they knew things, or they went to the library or they came in and asked me! That was really kind of fun. I had a number of customers who trusted me to give them good advice. I remember, too, they'd come in and ask questions about things.

I remember, one time a man came in and said to me, "What does a modern teach a child about religion?" That was the question he put to me as a bookseller.

I said, "Well, what do you believe?"

He said, "I don't know."

I said, "Well, I'm afraid you're going to have to go home and decide what you believe before you can teach your child anything, because there's no use in the world in your giving anything to a child you don't believe yourself. That's the first thing." So that was that. Another time, a man came in and said to me, "What do you tell a child about death?"

I had lots of hard questions, you see. I remember, one woman came in. She was a very nice young woman, and she had a baby who was about a year and a half old. Her mother had sent her twenty-five dollars to get books for "baby." So we selected. You could buy quite a few books, you know, for twenty-five dollars. I showed her the books that I thought were the very best and she bought two or three of those, but she mostly bought what she liked. And then

Hawkins: gradually, she'd come in more often. Mother would send her twenty-five dollars every once in a while and she'd come in. Finally after about the fourth time, she said, "After this, don't let me buy what I want. Make me take what you want. I notice that baby always likes the books you pick out and doesn't care about the books I pick out" [laughter].

And I said, "Well, you certainly must have books that you want."

"No," she said, "you pick them out."

One time I picked out something and she called me back, and she said, "Do you really like this book?"

And I said, "I think it's perfectly delightful."

She said, "I think it's a silly book."

And I said, "Well, it is; it's nonsense. But if you don't like it, you bring it back and I'll exchange it for something else."

"No, no," she said. "If you say you like it, I'll keep it." Well, that's a pretty big, a pretty big...

Maguire: Trust!

Hawkins: Trust. And you have to be careful that you fulfill it. I remember one time, a library burned up in northern California. Afterwards, I was up there for a library meeting, and the librarian said to me--this was in May--and he said, "I haven't had time to do anything with the children's books. We've replaced lots of the adult books. Do you think you could pick out about \$2000 worth of books for the children's room?"

I said, "Why, yes, of course I can."

He said, "We have to have them quite soon because we have to get them in before the first of July." Then he said, "No, make it \$4000."

So I said, "Well, what I'll do is pick the books out and I'll have a list sent up to you, and then you can check out the books you don't want, and we'll send you the balance. You let us know what you want."

So we did that. I went down to the store. In those days, \$1000 worth of books were an awful lot of books. I said, "Do you want just single copies, or do you want multiple copies?"

Hawkins: He said, "No, multiple copies would be fine up to, say, four copies apiece."

So I picked them out with the help of the girls in my department. We went through the books. They'd bring something to me and I'd say, "No, no, that's not good enough. Put it back." So when the books were picked out, we alphabetized them by author and packed them by author, so we could get at them. And they were marked on the outside, what was in the boxes, because we didn't have room to just pile them up. So I sent him the list and wrote, "Would you please send back the list and cross out what you don't want."

I didn't hear and I didn't hear and I didn't hear. So I wrote him another note and I said, "Please tell me what you want taken out."

He wrote back, "We want substantially what you've sent." Well, that didn't do me any good at all. It was the end of the fiscal year, and librarians were coming in to spend the rest of their money that they hadn't spent. Because if they didn't, it would go into the general fund or it would go back, and they didn't want to do that. This was money that they'd set aside for other books that they'd ordered that hadn't come through, books that were out of print or the publishers hadn't sent them or what have you.

I was getting desperate because I could sell these books, you see. Finally I said, "Please tell me what you don't want so I can take it out," and explained to him.

So he wrote back and said, "Well, we'll take all except the Cowboy Sam books. We have them."

There were exactly seven books. And all the rest of them he kept. This man was a real librarian. He wasn't somebody that didn't know. So I felt that was really a compliment.

Maguire: Did you often get big orders like that?

Hawkins: Oh, yes. There were lots of big orders. But that was one thing. Then another time, another librarian came in and asked me to pick some books and I did. She came down and she went through it. She took out about six or eight books but the rest of them she kept.

This was always very gratifying to me, as you can well imagine. But I felt it was a very definite time for me not to give them "little treasures," [See p. 11] [chuckle] but to really consider.

One time, a high school library was to be filled. The school had been burned and rebuilt. I was on the road and had stopped at this library. They were going to have a opening and they needed some

Hawkins: books, and they hadn't gotten any books for their library. So the librarian said to me he wanted, I guess this was around \$4000 worth of books, and these would be single copies. I was to just send him anything, you see, on approval. Well, to build a high school library from scratch, without any books at all? I was still on the road. I couldn't pick them out myself. I wrote back to the firm and told them to please send up, on approval, all the books that we had up to \$4000 worth, that were on the basic high school library list that was put out by the American Library Association.

Maguire: That was a good list?

Hawkins: Oh, it was an excellent list. It had every kind of book in it, you see. It was a basic library so that you had all subjects covered. So that's what they did. Now I know perfectly well if that had been sent to some other firm, that wouldn't have been what they would have done. They would have picked out anything. But I was appreciative of the fact that they were trusting me. We were an extremely honorable firm.

Maguire: That's a lot of responsibility, for you to be choosing an entire library.

Hawkins: It is, but it was fun. They kept almost all of those books, too. They sent back some books on drama, which they should have kept but they didn't.

Customers

Maguire: You mentioned to me last time that you wanted to discuss the librarianship students who came to the store.

Hawkins: Oh yes! That was my fun. As I say, we were very close to the university [University of California, Berkeley], and little by little the library students would drop in and look at our books. Of course, there were books there that they couldn't get out of the library because they were out already, and they knew perfectly well that they could spend all the time they wished in our shop. Nobody ever bothered them, and they would stay there and read all afternoon. Maybe three or four of them would come in with their books, and they'd sit there and look the books over.

Maguire: They were sitting in the children's department--in those tables and chairs?

Hawkins: At the little tables and little chairs, you know. And then--I couldn't help it--I always would come and talk to them. Before I knew it, I was giving them little lectures on the best of children's books and telling them about books that I admired very much and bringing them out and showing them to them--that sort of thing. It was only later that I realized that some of the library students really appreciated it. This was when Ellen Williams, who was a librarian, gave some money for the Jewel Gardner Fund* and sent a letter which was read at this meeting. In it she mentioned all the people at the library school, and then she also mentioned me and Sather Gate Book Shop, and how much that had meant to her. It was the first time that I'd had any idea of how much that it could have meant to some of these people. We're still friends, as a matter of fact, and she told me that I would never know how much they valued this time that they could come in and discuss children's books with someone who loved them. Of course, by this time, I was pretty experienced.

But I always had a very high opinion of children's books and that they should be the very best.

Maguire: When you came to Sather Gate Book Shop, the children's department had a good reputation?

Hawkins: Oh yes, excellent and I tried to uphold it.

Maguire: And the department grew?

Hawkins: Well, it grew as we got more customers, yes. But Mrs. Mitchell was the one who set the tone for it, and I'm sure that my work was colored by her high standards. She even had standards that were higher than mine. After I took over, there were some books that I did carry that she would never have had in the store. I've forgotten what they were. They weren't very much different, but there were some things that I felt were okay of which she was very scornful.

Maguire: Did she used to come in and visit?

Hawkins: Oh no, no, no, she didn't. She was busy. And then, after her husband died, she went back into librarianship, and she worked at the Oakland Public Library until she died.

*The Jewel Gardner Fund was established by the School Library Association of California in memory of this school librarian who was in charge of the Sacramento school libraries and, as Ms. Hawkins has remarked, was "excellent."

Maguire: You said also that there were professors who used to come in quite a bit and talk and meet?

Hawkins: Oh yes, there were a number of people. I remember particularly Professor [Thomas K] Whipple because he was teaching modern literature. He'd always come in to see what the new books were in fiction. Of course, when I first started working for Sather Gate Book Shop, I also was in the fiction department as well as the children's department.

I remember, a couple of times--it was very funny--when I was in the children's department, a man came over one time and said, "I've decided to take that edition of the Decameron you recommended." That was hardly a children's book, but things like that were sort of fun. I read quite a bit of fiction, and I would talk to Mr. Whipple and other professors who would drop in.

And I remember Harold Small, from the University Press, would come in often. In those days, the University Press was right around the corner from Sather Gate Book Shop, and it was a place where they dropped in at lunchtime. They would always browse. They bought books too, but they were perfectly welcome to spend as long as they liked browsing.

Maguire: These days, it seems as though most of the professors--that I know--order their books directly from the publishers. Is that the case in general?

Hawkins: Well, that may well be. Many professors get books free from publishers. They write in and say that they're professor for such and such a thing and that they're going to possibly use a book as a text. The publishers will usually send it to them, especially now with paperbacks being so much used for textbooks. They get a lot of free books. They sometimes overdo it, I think, but that's one way of accumulating a library for free. [Chuckle]

Maguire: But, they must miss browsing.

Hawkins: Well, there aren't any bookstores they can browse in, really. Nothing like Sather Gate Book Shop, certainly. There are the bookshops along the avenue that carry textbooks, and they carry other trade books too, but not in the same proportion.

Maguire: Were any of those shops on Telegraph competitors, or was Sather Gate pretty unique?

Hawkins: Sather Gate was absolutely unique. There was no question about it. There was no bookstore that I ever knew that was quite like it. And it's because it was both wholesale and retail. For a long, long time

Hawkins: they weren't separated; they were together. It was only after Vroman's went out of business that we had so much wholesale that it sort of became the overpowering part of it. Of course, it was at that time that the problems really began. It's just too bad that Sather Gate couldn't have grown naturally and gradually, expanded gradually. It had to do it so fast, and it had to get so many people in and there were many of them inexperienced. The tone of it changed a little bit after that.

Discounting Practices

Maguire: Why did Vroman's go out of business?

Hawkins: It was competition from the East, I think, to a large extent--the same thing that happened with us eventually. It was the same thing. The eastern people simply offered more discounts. Actually, the discount wasn't that different, but you couldn't persuade the librarians that it wasn't real.

I found a rather interesting thing. One library sent us a bill that one of our competitors had billed. The library wanted us to bill on their own form. This was not too many years ago. This was not in the days that we're talking about, but later. The library wanted it billed on their own bill head, with the name of the library at the top and everything. They said that if we'd be willing to do it, that would be all right--they would like to have us show what it would be like. Well, this was a bill, and it had the discounts on it and everything. It was the first time we'd ever had access to something like this. So I priced the books. We took the prices that were there, but I priced them for discounting as we would discount it to see what difference there would be.

This company had no net books. "Net" means that they sold for the retail price. The lowest discount was three percent and the highest was thirty-eight percent, and they had a twenty percent and a fifteen percent and a three percent. We had thirty-two percent, twenty percent, ten percent, and no percent.

So I priced these books according to the way we would discount them. I added up what the bill came to. It was just one page, you see. If they'd bought the books from us they would have saved 65¢, although no discount that we had was higher than thirty-two percent. But, our competitors were giving three percent discount on a lot of books that we gave thirty-two percent on. That's how they were able to give thirty-eight percent. And very few of their books, only fiction, would be thirty-eight percent.

Hawkins: They would set up categories. For instance, they'd say technical books were three percent, and so forth. Well, some of these books that they classified as technical books were getting full trade discount from the publishers as I well knew.

Maguire: Could you publicize this fact in any way?

Hawkins: No, because we weren't supposed to know about it. Oh, I mentioned, without mentioning the name of the firm, that this was what happened because I could understand how they could offer these discounts. What we did was give them a discount according to how we were discounted. If we were given a trade discount, we gave them a trade discount. If we got a short discount, we gave them a short discount. And if we got only ten percent discount, well, then we had to do it at net because it cost more than ten percent to handle it. Because we paid the postage, you see, both ways, from the publisher and to the customer.

And then if the book was sold to us at the net price, we added twenty percent as a carrying charge, that is, for handling. We lost money on it unless it was an expensive book. If it were a dollar book, for instance, we lost quite a bit of money.

Maguire: It's a shame that something like that couldn't have been made known.

Hawkins: Well, you can't persuade them. There are lots of tricks of the trade. Right now, I'm glad I'm out of the book business. It's just a jungle. Imagine, nowadays nobody sells you a book, they just wrap them up. You've got to find your own book. They won't even find your book for you. They point to a shift and they say to you, "It may be over there." Or they'll say, "What is its category? Is it philosophy, or--?" And if you don't know what the book is yourself, it's too bad. They're not going to hunt for it for you, nor are they going to find it for you or make a suggestion.

Maguire: I rarely think of even asking anyone for help.

Hawkins: Not only that, when I've called up to ask if a specific book is in stock--because I'll come down if it is, and there's no point in making a trip if it isn't--they'll say, "We're busy now. We can't check on it. Come in and look."

Maguire: Which would have been unthinkable at Sather Gate?

Hawkins: Unthinkable is right! It never would occur to us to point and say--unless they wanted to browse on a certain collection of books. For instance, if they wanted to look at the animal stories, well, then I'd show them where the animal stories were, but if they wanted a book about dogs, I'd pull out books about dogs and let them look at them.

Maguire: And talk to them about it?

Hawkins: And talk to them about it.

Publishers' Representatives

Maguire: You discussed Denny Chase [see p. 14] and I wondered if you could discuss some other publishers' representatives.

Hawkins: Oh, they were an interesting lot. Mrs. Mitchell, for instance, would say that she didn't ever go out to lunch with any of the salesmen, but when I got to know them, the ones I liked, I'd have lunch with. But it never made the slightest bit of difference in my buying. If a book was good, I bought it and if it was a bad book, I didn't buy it. In fact, I would tell them so.

I remember, Jim Blake was the Harper's salesman. He always called me "Glory." He was the one that told me about Sather Gate Book Shop in the first place. I told you that story, didn't I?

Maguire: In the earlier interview, yes.*

Hawkins: Well, he was a great man, and he got me my job at Macy's in New York; that is, he told me that Mr. Sommer had gotten me the job. One day he said to me, "Glory"--he always called me "Glory" for some unknown reason. I think there was a heroine named Gloria Quail in some book, and I never knew what the book was. He said, "Glory, I don't have time to read the galleys on juveniles. I trust you. Now, I'll send you the galleys, and I'll pay you a dollar for every one you send me a report on. I want to know whether it's any good. I don't want you to give me pap. I want you to tell me: is it good, or isn't it good? And if it isn't good, why it isn't good; and if it is good, why it is good."

I thought that was just great. I got a chance to read a whole lot of things ahead of time and got paid for it. Why, I would have read them anyway for free. I did that for quite a while.

*Recorded by Anne Brower in an interview for the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Untranscribed tapes available at The Bancroft Library; description of James Blake recorded November 8, 1976, approximately five minutes into tape 1, side 2.

Salesmen gave a party for Alice Mellow's retirement



Left to right:

Top row: Floyd Nourse, Sr. [salesman for Knopf & Viking Press]; David Bramble [Farrar, Rinehart]; John Dennis Chase [Harcourt Brace]; Carl Smalley [E.P. Dutton & Etc.]; Harrison Leussler [Houghton Mifflin]; Joseph Carroll [Charles Scribners]; John Gregg [Blue Ribbon Book]; Jesse Carmack [William Morrow & Duell, Sloane & Pierce].

Middle row: Carolyn Kahn, Helen Smith, Peggy Nourse, Dr. Benjamin Mellow, Frances Giffen, Barbara Gregg, Eileen Pennington

Seated: Catherine Jane Herbert, Ronald Smith, Alice Mellow, Frederick Kahn Quail Hawkins



Left to right:

Standing: Harvey Fergusson, Mrs. Hugh Calkins, Jeanne-Marie Lee, Jean Seznec

Seated: Florence Jensen, Helen [Hannah Hinsdale] Hawkins, Mrs. Jean Seznec [Jeanne-Marie's mother], *in front:* Quail Hawkins



Eugene Sommer
circa 1935

Hawkins: Recently, I came across some of the correspondence, the letters that I had written him saying why I liked such and such a book, and what its market would be I thought, and so forth.

Then there was another one, a man who sold books for Nelson. I think his name was Tom MacLaren. He was a pleasant man. I didn't know at first, but I was always talking about what the books were like when I would buy them: this book I didn't like and this book I did, and what I thought about it. Sometime later, I was told that he would always tell his other customers what I had said about it. "Quail Hawkins thinks this is a very good book." This person who told me said Mr. MacLaren told him that he always came to me first because he wanted to find out what the books were like, whether they were any good or not.

Not all of the salesmen were as good as Denny. Jesse Carmack was one I liked extremely well. He was with Morrow. Jesse Carmack is a friend of mine. I visit him when I go down to Santa Monica. His wife and daughter and he are friends. Denny Chase and his wife are friends of mine. These were friends, not just booksellers.

Buying Books for the Shop

Maguire: Did you spend very much time with them when they came into town?

Hawkins: Well, it depended on the length of their line. If they had a large line, yes. I remember one day, I had two salesmen: one in the morning, and one in the afternoon. I was absolutely exhausted that night. I couldn't imagine why I was so tired. I said to myself, I only had two salesmen. Then I realized that each salesmen had about twenty lines--twenty publishers, small publishers that they represented. I had to decide how many copies--or whether I'd buy any--of all these books. So that I had been buying about fifteen to twenty lines, and each one of them had several books. You have to make a decision: yes or no. And decisions are hard work. And I said, "Well, no wonder you're tired! Decisions, decisions, decisions." But this is it. You're deciding.

[end tape 1, side 2; begin tape 2, side 1]

Hawkins: That is really the crux of purchasing books. You have to decide whether or not you're going to sell how many copies. If it's a new book, you have to think, "Is this an author whose work I know of? Is this the kind of author that my customers are interested in?"

Hawkins: In a retail shop, you have a completely different buying problem than you do when you have wholesale. Because in wholesale, you might possibly buy twos and threes of things that you think you'll have--well, after all, if you have fifty-seven libraries, you can sell two copies, pretty nearly, of everything that's good--you think. But when you have a retail situation, you have to be very, very much more selective. That's why, unless you have a wholesale clientele as well, you're much more circumscribed. You can't possibly carry the variety of stock. For retail sale, you have to think in terms of more than five copies. If you can't sell five copies of something, and you're pretty sure you can't, you will skip it. Maybe if you have a very circumscribed list, you will only buy things that you're pretty sure you can sell twenty-five copies of.

Maguire: If you had problems selling something, couldn't you move that into the wholesale stock?

Hawkins: Well, we didn't separate them at the beginning. The whole stock was there. And the librarians would come in and look at the books on the table, and so would the retail customers--the same tables.

Promptness of Service

Hawkins: I remember one time there was a librarian from Contra Costa County, Mrs. Fern Wing Bell, very nice woman. She used to come down on Saturdays, and she'd always drop in Sather Gate Book Shop. But the Contra Costa County Library didn't buy books from us, and she always would apologize for spending so much time with us when she wasn't buying anything. She would always buy, oh, maybe a half a dozen books just to make it possible, you know, to--she wouldn't feel guilty.

Well, by and by, she said that they were having a considerable difficulty. They were buying almost all their books from Sam Levinson in Sacramento. You see, Martinez was where the library was at that time, and Fern Bell was handling the school department. In those days, they did have a school department in the county library which furnished schools with books before the school libraries started.

So one day she told me that they'd been having quite a lot of mix-up. The school department had different funds from the regular library, and they had to be billed to the school department. Apparently, Levinson's got it mixed up. So she had suggested to Jessie Lea, who was the librarian, that she buy all her school department books from Sather Gate Book Shop, so that they would know that if any books came in from Sather Gate, it belonged to the school

Hawkins: department, not to the other department. Jessie Lea, who liked us but hadn't bought any books from us, decided this would be quite all right.

Then Fern Bell used to come down and order her books from us. I might add the school department bought an awful lot of children's books, so it was a very good deal. I always laugh because I'm sure that it came about because I was willing and always reassured her that she was perfectly welcome to browse all she wanted. I never made her feel guilty. I always tried to make her feel perfectly comfortable.

When she left the department to retire, she asked me to lunch and introduced me to Thelma Dahlin, the person who was taking her job and told her that I was very good. Well, Mrs. Dahlin, on the first of July, sent me a large order. It was an order for \$1000 worth of books. So we sent all the books that we had in stock to them, and then we filled in as they came in.

Along the middle of September, she came in and she was just frothing at the mouth. It seems that she had sent a thousand dollar order to us, and a thousand dollar order to Vroman's. She was trying to see who would give her the best service. She said, "I got a third of the books I ordered from Sather Gate Book Shop within a week of the order. The balance of them came in in small amounts, but ninety-eight percent of the books I'd received by the end of August. I hadn't gotten a single book from Vroman's in the middle of August, and I wrote to them several times and asked them please to send them. I said to them, 'Please, please, I need the books.' And they said, 'This is our busy time,' and that they would send them."

She got mad, so she said, "Any books you can ship in twenty-four hours, ship, and cancel the balance." She said she got about two-thirds of her order. Then she brought the other third down to us. And from that time, she bought from us.

Of course, that's exactly what happened to us when Vroman's went out of business. We got absolutely clobbered with orders and we couldn't fill them quickly enough. We lost a lot of our good old customers because our service deteriorated so.

Busy Seasons

Maguire: What were the heavy work seasons in the year?

Hawkins: Oh well, right after the first of July when the new budget went in with public libraries, always. Of course, when the school libraries came in--It was always the end of May when the orders came in; they would send them at the end of the semester, but they were dated for July. Then, of course, the fall books, in the fall, there were lots of--

The retail was, of course, around Christmas. That was the big time for that. But I would say we ordered books through the year depending on what was coming out. In those days, most of the heavy publishing was in the fall and some was in the spring. But it's pretty well evened out now, I think. There's just about as many books published in the spring as in the fall.

Maguire: I'd heard that, for the retail part of the store, sometimes during the Christmas season the entire staff would go out for dinner or to breakfast.

Hawkins: Yes, we used to have those. The Kahns had a breakfast party, usually on the twenty-fourth in the morning. We'd have it and then get over to the store.

But we also had friends among the authors. Esther Birdsall Darling and Hildegarde Hawthorne wrote children's books, both of them. Esther Birdsall Darling wrote Baldy of Nome and Navarre of the North and several others. She had an apartment not very far from Sather Gate Book Shop. During the Christmas season we worked at night as well, and we, each of us, had an hour off for dinner. "Darling" would have the whole staff to dinner, and she would have her Alaska Beans and other things. That was the book department staff, the adult and the juvenile. We all loved her.

And of course, "Hildy" was there, Hildegarde Hawthorne. "Darling" would always have a little gift for us. We'd come in batches because we had different dinner hours, you see. But each of us would come at the dinner hour that we had, and it was always such fun. She did this for, oh, I think eight or nine years. It was just a tradition at Christmas, and we loved it.

Maguire: Even though you were probably a little tired.

Hawkins: Well, it was always such a refreshing time. She would always have a drink for us, and the Alaska Beans were just out of this world. She had a great big pot of them. I had the recipe at one time, but I've lost it, unfortunately.

Purchasing Guides

Maguire: A subject I wanted to pick up and ask you to expand on a bit: was there a lot of guesswork in buying?

Hawkins: It's all guesswork!

Maguire: It was all guesswork? But you had recommendations, and then you had reviews.

Hawkins: Well, you don't have many reviews when you buy the book because they haven't come out yet. They usually don't have reviews until the books are published. You buy the books in the spring for the books that come out in the fall, and you buy the books in the fall for the books that are coming out in the spring. You buy them way ahead of time. The Publishers' Weekly always had lots of ads, you know: "These are the best books," and "so and so has sold thousands of copies," and so forth. A lot of advertising. And sometimes access to galleys. And there was always a forecast in the Publishers' Weekly. Of course, that was the booksellers' bible, the Publishers' Weekly. You read that from "kiver to kiver," at least I did.

Then there were several book review areas or sources that I used for recommendations after the books came out. I would read these reviews and note which ones were considered excellent or poor, and mostly I agreed with them. Sometimes I didn't, but more often than not--For instance, I very often didn't agree with the Library Journal. At that time, there wasn't a School Library Journal, it was just Library Journal. I didn't think their reviews were as--I didn't think the people who reviewed them were quite as skilled as some of the people in others.

Now, there was the Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, which had a book review section, and that I liked very much because it would tell what book it rejected and what book that it recommended. But even on the books it rejected, it would tell the good parts of them as well as the bad parts. So that you could make up your mind if you thought, if you felt that this wasn't valid.

Then of course, I read the ACL [Association of Children's Librarians of Northern California] reviews. These were very uneven too, but there was always discussion by those who had read the book--defended it if they thought the review was too harsh or would be harsher than the reviewer if they felt the book wasn't good. I recently came across an ACL book list and it was very, very good, much more so than originally. They've become a real force in book reviewing.

Hawkins: Now the Horn Book for instance, was one that you felt if it recommended a book, it was a very fine book. Then, for adult books and others, I liked the reviews of the Publishers' Weekly. But they had a single person that did it, whereas the Library Journal had farmed the books out, and the people were not equally good in their reviewing abilities. The Publishers' Weekly would have a forecast of books to come, and their reviews were usually not just blurbs. They'd say how good it was.

And then there was the Virginia Kirkus Review which I didn't usually see, but which was done for libraries. Virginia Kirkus was the same Virginia Kirkus that was the children's editor at Harper's. Then she started this book review service, which has grown to quite some size.

Maguire: And that would have affected...

Hawkins: That would often affect the sale. Of course, what the ALA [American Library Association] book list recommended, you always got orders for those books. So you read those and kept track of them. There'd be a list, the ALA list for small libraries and things like that. And of course, I read the Saturday Review of Literature and the Herald Tribune book section on Sundays, and the New York Times book section. We'd subscribe to them.

Maguire: When did publishers' representatives start bringing "dummies" [see below] along rather than an entire book for you to examine?

Hawkins: I guess probably during the depression.

Maguire: That early?

Hawkins: Well, it's hard to judge for sure. But you know, originally, they used to bring the books. All the children's books would be printed by June, and most of the books that were going to come out in the fall. Very rarely did they not have a finished book with them. Salesmen would take a room in a hotel and have display tables, and you would come over there and see them. When I got to buying books, this was no longer true, so that was in the '30s that salesmen would come over. Only once in a while would you have it the other way. The salesmen would come with dummies...

Maguire: Which must have been not nearly as helpful.

Hawkins: Well, usually, a dummy wasn't just a jacket. It was a jacket and the cover of the book and usually the first chapter so you saw what the type was like and maybe an illustration. Sometimes you'd have several illustrations. I would always read the first chapter or whatever was there to see whether I liked the style or not, especially

Hawkins: if it was someone I didn't know. I could tell, in a way, by looking at it whether or not it had the quality that was necessary.

I also learned to skip, and it's now very hard for me to read a whole book. Because in order to know about a lot of books, I'd read the first three or four chapters, the last three or four chapters, and maybe a chapter in the middle to get an idea of the way the story developed and things like that. Then I'd go on to the next one. If it was something I liked enormously, then I'd start at the beginning again and read it all the way through.

Maguire: This must have been a sort of speed reading.

Hawkins: Well, it was, really, you had to skim. Another thing, too, that was fun--funny rather than fun--was a customer asking you what a book was like which you hadn't actually read. I would read from the blurb while the customer was holding it out. I'd read the blurb from the bottom up while she was looking at the blurb, apparently not reading it at all, and then I'd tell her what the book was about. [Laughter]

I remember one woman who was a very good customer and who was a lawyer--I'd read some reviews of the book and everything, and I was talking to her about it. She kept saying, "Have you read the book?" And I went on without--Finally, she said, "Have you read this book?"

And I said, "No."

She said, "That's all I wanted to know." [Laughter]

Maguire: Did you ever really make mistakes in buying, where you'd order a huge volume...

Hawkins: Oh, you always made mistakes in buying. It didn't make any difference what you got, it was the wrong amount. That's why you had to reorder, and that's why you had things left over that you sometimes had to return to the publishers--after they took them back [see pp. 10-11]. You didn't get a chance to return basic stock. You ordered that and that was yours, the older books. But the new books, it was all guess-work.

How to Sell Books

Hawkins: I remember one time, this book came in and it just sat there. I'd bought seventy-five copies of it and I couldn't figure out why I'd bought it. The jacket wasn't very attractive, and the author wasn't one that I knew very much about. It was a Junior Literary Guild besides, and that always would cut down the amount of books because

Hawkins: the libraries bought the Junior Literary Guild books direct. So I took it home and read it, and then I realized why I had bought it: it was a darn good book. I sold those seventy-five copies just like that because I had read it, and it was good. It was called Kildee House by George Rutherford Montgomery. It was a delightful book.

Then another book that I had sitting around had what I considered a rather poor jacket. At an ACL meeting, the librarian who reviewed it was so enthusiastic about the book, that I went back to the shop and picked it up and read it. I was equally enthusiastic and I sold a lot of copies of that. It was called Julie's Secret Sloth by Jacqueline Jackson.

Maguire: So your enthusiasm really made a big difference.

Hawkins: Oh, it makes all the difference in the world. If you really like a book, you can sell it. If you don't like it, you might just as well say, "I don't like it. This has had good reviews and it has interested a lot of people, but I personally don't like it." Sometimes a customer will buy it, if he asks your opinion. You don't volunteer your opinion on a book you don't like. If he comes in and asks for it, you wrap it up. You don't argue. [Laughter]

Reviewing Books

Maguire: Did you write many articles on books for library journals?

Hawkins: Well, I didn't write for the Library Journal, no. But I did put out for the store something called "News and Reviews." I listed all of the new books that came in, and I would do a little descriptive bit about them. I never made comment--that is, I cut out adjectives. When the blurb said, "This is a story of such and such," I cut out all the admiring adverbs and just tried to tell what the story was about. But if I had read the book, I would then say what I thought about it.

This I did monthly. Later on, when I was a buyer for the whole shop, I turned it over to the others in the Boys' and Girls' Book Room and it gradually disappeared. I don't remember when it stopped, but it did eventually.

But this was very useful and I sent it out to all our library customers. We'd get them back marked with numbers on them--the whole list sent back with the order on it. So it was really useful.

Maguire: Big job, though, coming out with a report like this.

Hawkins: Yes. That was part of the work I did when I had help to sell books.

Effects of the War on Bookselling

Maguire: I wanted to ask you too, about the effects of World War II on the store. I had heard that it was difficult during that time to get books of good quality, that the paper wasn't good and so forth.

Hawkins: Very, very difficult. And not only that, but you couldn't always get as many books as you wanted because of the paper shortage. I remember, you ordered a hundred copies and hoped you'd get fifty because they pro-rated them. If you wanted fifty copies, you ordered a hundred if it was going to be a best-seller. Only one time I got fooled. I got all 150. I wanted about fifty. [Laughter] Took me a long time to sell that.

Maguire: Did you have any trouble getting employees during this time?

Hawkins: Yes. I did. I think I told you about Ede Atmore [see pp.33-35]. She was one I got during that time, and I just picked her--someone who'd come in and was interested in books. She turned out to be very fine. I didn't have much choice. I took what I could get. Sometimes I had good help and sometimes I had poor.

During the Battle of the Bulge, I had a German woman, Mrs. Kolmar. Her son was in the Battle of the Bulge, and she was terribly worried because he was Jewish. She was terribly afraid he'd be captured by the Germans. But she was an awfully nice woman. She didn't know English too well. She knew it pretty well. But she came to me and she said, "What is meemars of a lalla daw?"

And I said, "What?"

"What's meemars of a lawla daw?"

I couldn't think. Finally, I said, "Oh! Memoirs of a London Doll?" [Laughter] You just had to guess, you know, but that was right, that was what she was trying to say. She was trying to repeat what a customer had said over the phone, and she couldn't get it. That was very funny.

Maguire: Did you really feel the effects of the war? Were they very important?

Hawkins: Well, they were very important because you couldn't always get books. I remember one book that was very popular. I ordered 200 copies and thought I'd get 75, and the order never came at all. I never got

Hawkins: any copies. They said the order had gotten lost, and by the time I realized it, the book was gone. There were no more copies, and I couldn't ever get it. And we had lots of orders for it.

Maguire: And then did things change back to normal after the war ended?

Hawkins: Oh, yes, after the war, paper became available and it was not quite the same. But the war made a great deal of difference. It brought a great many people here, so our population increased enormously. It made a difference in the whole thing.

Sather Gate's Lending Library

Maguire: I just wanted to ask you very briefly about the lending library.

Hawkins: Well, that was a concession. It didn't belong to Sather Gate at all. There was a woman who owned it. I think her name was Mrs. Sage. She had it for quite a number of years. One person that I remember very much was Anita Byleveldt. Anita's parents were Dutch. She was the most popular girl I ever saw. She was young and she loved people who were Spanish. She lived in the Spanish-speaking house on campus. She's living here near Berkeley, right over in Orinda, on the other side. And Marian Tully--she just worked for the lending library and later sold adult books for years.

Maguire: Did the library occupy the same building as the store?

Hawkins: It was right at the head of the stairs in the old building. We didn't have room for it, I think, in the new one when we moved. I think we had to give it up.

Maguire: Did it then completely fold?

Hawkins: Well, I don't know. I'm not sure what happened. I don't remember. It may have been there, but I think it was too small to take the lending library, too. The owner went somewhere else. She didn't fold, but she took it somewhere else.

Maguire: Did that affect your sales at all, having a lending library in the store?

Hawkins: It brought a lot of people in.

Maguire: It did?

Hawkins: Oh yes, a great many people. But I don't know how many of those

Hawkins: people actually bought books. They paid, you see at the lending library. They paid seventy-five cents or fifty cents or something.
[end tape 2, side 1; end interview]

CHAPTER III

[Interview: March 7, 1978]
[begin tape 1, side 1]

San Francisco Chronicle Book Page

Maguire: We're still discussing the period in which you worked for the Sather Gate Book Shop buying children's books, before you began buying for the entire store. There are some things I want to go back and ask you before we move on. The first thing, did you contribute, as I understand you did, to the San Francisco Chronicle book page?

Hawkins: Yes, that was rather an amusing thing in a way. Joseph Henry Jackson was the book reviewer at the Chronicle and was a very, very nice person whom I knew. At that time, I was doing this "News and Reviews" that I think I mentioned--[see p. 64]

Maguire: The bulletin?

Hawkins The bulletin. One time I made a mistake in one of the descriptions of a book. I've now forgotten what it was, but it was a definite error, and I caught it when I read the bulletin, and I wondered how I could have made that stupid mistake. Well, the children's book page for the Chronicle, a book list that came out for Book Week, I was reading it and suddenly realized that he had simply lifted the bulletin. They'd taken various titles and just had used my work without any credit.

Maguire: Did you know him at this time?

Hawkins: Oh, yes. But, the thing that was funny was that the reason I knew it was mine was because he had made the same mistake that I had made, and that's what clued me in. I don't always remember my own words and then I began comparing, and to my great surprise this whole list was mine.

Hawkins: So I wrote him a note and said I was very pleased to know that he thought my work was good enough to use, but that if I'd only known about it, I could have told him that there was this error which had crept in. I did not accuse him of anything and I think he was a little embarrassed. Nothing was ever said and that was the end of it. But he asked me next year to do the book list for the Chronicle, and I did it for a number of years. In fact, I think I did it until the year he died. I don't remember for sure.

It was not an easy thing to do because I was given carte blanche. There was never any saying, "Look, you must review books that are advertised" or anything like that. But I tried to balance the list, that is, to divide it into age groups and to have about the same number of books in each age group, and then I tried not to be too generous to any one particular publisher. If it included too many books from one publisher, then I'd try to read some other books.

There were an awful lot of books, you understand, to choose from, and it's easier to choose ten books than it is to choose fifty books, because the ten outstanding things are there, but when you get to fifty, they're not all that outstanding and you have to balance. There may be actually more good books for children in the earlier years than there are in the ones for older children, but you don't want to have it top heavy.

Then I always liked to at least mention the local authors, to give them at least a break. I never wrote anything in the description that wasn't what I really believed. If I didn't care for the author's book I wouldn't necessarily say it was a poor book, but I wouldn't say anything about it except that this book was by this author who was a San Franciscan and it was about such and such. I let it go at that, because it wasn't just critical things. It was difficult to balance it.

Of course, after he died, Mrs. Joseph Henry Jackson was given the job that I had done previously and she did a very good job. She's still doing it, I believe, for the book week issue.

Maguire: When did you begin to do this?

Hawkins: I can't remember. I must have done it for eight or nine years, and he died quite a long time ago. I really don't remember, unfortunately. Well, I was doing it when I went to the Press and I did it about one year more--till about 1955 probably.

Maguire: How much did you write about each book if you were writing about so many?

Hawkins: Maybe two or three sentences. It was a list rather than a critical description of each book. I tried to leave out adjectives and put in a description of the book. Only if I liked the book enormously did I say, "This book is wonderful and you should do so and so about it." But very few books were that good. I tried to be descriptive, to tell what the books were like. And they were good books. I didn't have any bad books in it.

Maguire: Was it time consuming?

Hawkins: Very time consuming, and choosing the books was almost the most difficult. Once you had chosen them, then you could pretty much write your review. I always had read the books that I described. In other words, if I picked out the books and I read something I thought I was going to like and I found it was very poor, I would discard it and find something else that was better because it was going to be a recommended list.

Maguire: Didn't you also do these kinds of lists for California library journals? I read one.

Hawkins: Originally, the first list I did was back when Mrs. Mitchell was still head of the children's department, and I did a model library for boys and girls. That was rather amusing. I just chose books that I thought were very important for a child to have and we printed it. ["A Model Library for Boys and Girls" in Publishers' Weekly, 124, number 25 (December 16, 1933), 2069-2073.]

In those days you could get things printed without costing a fortune and that again got mixed up. [Chuckle] I found out that the galleys got mixed, but the books were properly described. At any rate, the Publishers' Weekly got wind of it and they wrote me and asked for a copy, and they ran it in an article in the Publishers' Weekly. Then I got a letter from the Bureau of Copyrights at the Congressional Library, and they wanted two copies of it for the library.

Maguire: So this was an unusual article?

Hawkins: Well, apparently because it was long enough, they considered it a booklet, and I had never thought of it as anything that would be copyrighted. I don't think it was actually copyrighted although it may have been. They did ask for two copies which were deposited in the Library of Congress.

It's sort of fun to think, in a way, that your books are reposing in the national archives, you might say, and when I was in England last year...My niece's husband is a librarian in the British Museum, and he showed me the listing of my books that were in print in England.

Hawkins: He was quite pleased to find my name there, and it was interesting to feel that I had something in the British Museum. [Laughs] It was rather fun.

Maguire: To get back to Joseph Henry Jackson, when did you first meet?

Hawkins: I think I told you about the little garden cottage I lived in on Parker and College. Well, in the back of my house was a fence and on the other side of the fence, Joseph Henry Jackson and his wife and child lived in a garden cottage. We were both living in garden cottages at that time, but his was a very much nicer one than mine. I always wanted to meet Joseph Henry Jackson because they used to have such good parties. I could hear them and they all sounded such fun, but of course in years to come I met him through parties that we went to, both of us, publishers' parties.

Publishers' Gatherings

Hawkins: Publishers would sometimes have parties for authors. In fact, I remember Alfred Knopf and his wife Blanche had a party for some author, whose name I can't remember. The thing I remember mostly about it was that she was a very pretty woman and her book was getting quite a few good reviews, and at this party there were not a great many people. It wasn't a great big publishers' party, but a rather small one, and there was Sally Carrigher who did One Day on Beetle Rock and One Day at Teton Marsh and a number of other very fine nature books. It wasn't ten minutes in the party before I realized that Sally Carrigher was the most charming person that I had ever seen, and I mean charming, and the word "charm" is the viable word. She wasn't particularly good looking, but she had a quality that drew you to her so much that in a very short time, the author for whom the party was given and Mr. and Mrs. Knopf were in one part of the room, and everybody else in the whole party was centered around Sally Carrigher.

It was later, when I had dinner with Alfred Knopf, that I asked him why he had invited Sally Carrigher because he must have known that she would carry the party off--done without any attempt to be the center of the stage at all. She was just so delightful. I know perfectly well why animals came to her. They couldn't help themselves. They were charmed. There was some quality and it's very difficult to explain it. I don't know the reason. I don't know why it was, but that quality must have gone over to animals.

Hawkins: At any rate, at some time in the future, I was invited by Alfred Knopf to have dinner with him and I was very flattered. I also knew that my boss was out of town. This was before I had become buyer of the store, and the buyer was not there and I was the third choice. But I accepted with pleasure and to my great enjoyment, Ed Grabhorn and Jane Grabhorn were the other guests. It was one of the most interesting evenings that I ever spent. I had sense enough, for once in my life, to keep my mouth shut and listen, and I learned more about publishing in that one evening, I think, than I ever learned afterwards.

Publishing, Selling to Bookstores

Hawkins: The Grabhorns did fine printing, and Alfred Knopf had really brought fine printing into trade book publishing. He was the person who first made a point of having books that were beautifully designed. Also, at the back of the book he'd put whose type was being used, the size of the type, and the name of the type and the designer. He was one of the first people who made any effort to see that a book was a beautiful book--just a plain ordinary trade book, not a special edition, not a publisher like the Grabhorns who did only fine printing.

But publishers had many of the same problems. It was the first time I learned that one of the reasons why they sell books on a sale is because they can't afford to keep the stock. It costs so much to store them. In other words, they are renting space that the books take up. I think that might account for the fact, in the early days, when I was working at Graham's, that we were allowed to buy the books and have possession of them, but not pay for them for six months. For instance, we'd order books in July that would come out immediately and we would pay for them in the following January. But what we were doing was storing the books. They were ours. They weren't somebody else's that would come back. But we were doing the holding of the books so that the publishers weren't having to pay for storage of those books. It made it possible for them to let us wait to pay them. Do you see what I'm driving at?

Maguire: Yes, so everyone's better off.

Hawkins: Everyone benefits. This is not the case now. The books come out in such floods, and so fast and so many, that they are always constantly overlapping--and then the books do go back to the publishers. I don't know what they do with the returns. They sell them as remainders and sell them at a lower price, I guess.

Maguire: Did you have the same arrangement with publishers at Sather Gate or was this just with John W. Graham?

Hawkins: When I was working at Graham's, that was the accepted way of handling books, and I don't remember the exact year when this other began. It was a gradual thing. It wasn't one year it was one thing and the next year it was different. But, little by little, the booksellers said they couldn't afford to buy a lot of books of a new title because they didn't know whether they would sell or not. Then the publisher would say, "Buy fifty copies and what you don't sell, we'll take back," a sort of consignment proposition.

But a good trade salesman wouldn't let you stock up on too many copies of a book he knew you wouldn't sell. That's where a good salesman would be of help. If he knew you couldn't sell a hundred copies, he wouldn't sell you a hundred copies because ninety copies might come back. If the ninety copies came back, and the publishers had reprinted the book thinking that it was all sold, there would be a money loss. So they had to be careful of the quantity that they sold even though it was possible to return books.

Of course, as time went on they would send out lists of books that were returnable and when they were returnable, and the people would then send them back. But I'm not sure that it's an entirely good thing. It's a great help in getting an unknown author's books out but there are too many books anyway, and sometimes you can't represent a new author anyway, if you're a medium-sized bookstore.

Maguire: The publisher's representatives had to really know something about your clientele then.

Hawkins: Oh, they should. If they were good salesmen they had to know quite a little bit about your store. Well, when a salesman comes into a store and talks to the buyer, he has a fairly good notion of the kind of clientele that's coming in. If he has any sense at all he can spot it.

But in the earlier days, the book salesmen were bookmen. They knew their books. They read them and they knew about them, and they knew whether you could use them or not. Today's booksellers, with certain exceptions, don't read the books. They get promotion material from the promotion department telling them that this many thousand copies have been printed, and they're spending this much money on advertising, and that so and so's last book sold this many copies, and all of the information of that sort--this is going to be a best-seller because all of his other books have been.

Sometimes the bookmen are aware that this is going to be a flop and sometimes they aren't. But they go back to New York to what they call sales meetings, and the editors of the books talk to the salesmen and try to sell them the idea that these books that they have been responsible for are going to be the book. Of course, with so many thousands being published, there aren't many "the" books. There are a few.

Hawkins: It's very difficult to tell ahead of time what's going to happen because the best way to sell a book is by word of mouth. If people like a book, they'll buy it and if people don't like a book, they're not going to buy it. A lot of people will buy books to get on the bandwagon that they might not like, but somebody had to like it in the first place.

I was thinking of a book that has had enormous success. It came out as a children's book and didn't do very much the first year, but apparently it got in the hands of some people who thought very highly of it and it began to snowball. Once it gets started, then that's a different thing. The word of mouth goes because many times people don't want to admit that they don't particularly like what this is. [tape interruption: telephone]

The book I was thinking about when the phone rang sold absolutely enormous quantities. It came out as a children's book and didn't sell very well as a child's book, but then it began being taken up by adults and it had a tremendous sale. That was Jonathan Livingston Seagull. [by Richard Bach, New York: Macmillan, 1970.]

Well, I had tried to read it as a juvenile book. It was about 1972, I think, when it came out and I couldn't see that it was a very good book. [Laughs] Then, later on, I tried again to read it and I still don't consider it a good book, but it had a phenomenal sale. In fact, when I was in Italy in 1973, there was a whole window display of it. It's amazing.

Maguire: I would think it would be rather difficult to sell a book that you weren't excited about.

Hawkins: I wasn't selling books in 1973. I had retired. Oh, yes, it is if you don't like it. I never tried to sell a book I didn't like. If people came in and asked for it, I wouldn't prevent them, but if they asked me my opinion I would tell it to them. I never could sell a book I didn't like. I couldn't sell it. I could wrap it up if somebody wanted it. It isn't my job to tell them what they should read, although when I was young I thought it was.

I was a little bit of the didactic type--you know, this book is good for you--but I learned after awhile that everybody's entitled to an opinion. You might not agree with it, but he should have the opportunity of deciding for himself.

Providing Guidance on Book Selection

Maguire: That's another question that I wanted to ask you--whether you ever felt a temptation to improve the general taste of the reading public?

Hawkins: Oh course, when you're dealing with children, you have the feeling of responsibility to see that they are introduced to the very best because your child's taste is formed by what he eats, you might say. If he has lots of good things, he will eat good and bad, and he will like the bad as well as the good, but sooner or later the better and more sturdy types of books, the ones that have the most meat in them, will appeal to him if he'd got a mind. His imagination has a chance to develop.

Now, I remember when my little niece was very crazy about comics. I didn't care for them, but I didn't think she shouldn't have them if she wanted to spend her allowance on them, but I didn't want to look at them. (She was here during World War II.) I said, "You keep them in your room. I don't want them up in the living room because I don't like them. You can have them and read them and whatever you want, that's all right, but in my living room I don't want them.

One day, I was in her room and she held up a comic classic, Ivanhoe, and she said, thinking she had me over a barrel, "What do you think of this? [Laughs] "What have you got against this?"

I said, "I don't have anything against it, but the book I read of Ivanhoe was about two inches thick and it had rather small print, and you know as well as I do that there was a lot more in that book than there is in this. Besides, if these pictures that you see are the best pictures that you can imagine, that's just fine, but I can make up much better pictures in my mind than these. These aren't my ideal. I have things in my mind when I read about these characters that are very different from these pictures. But if that satisfies you, that's all right with me."

She looked at me a minute, she stared at me, and then she said, "You've got something there." [Laughs] In a sense, that is the reason. You should present children with plenty of good things, but by no means insist that they read them.

Maguire: You had parents to contend with as well.

Hawkins: Right. I always would tell a parent, "Provide your children with the good books, but do not ever insist that they read them because that's the quickest way to make them hate good books that I know of. The idea of a good book is one that is really delightful.

Hawkins: I had a very amusing experience once. I was talking at a school and all the fourth through sixth grade children were there in the auditorium. I read aloud part of Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book, the first part of the Mowli story, and I came to an exciting point where Shere Khan, the tiger, sticks his head in the cave and says, "Give me the child" and the mother wolf gets up and says, "Look you, hunter of little cubs--frog eater--fish killer--he shall hunt thee," and I stopped.

There was a cry from the whole class, "Go on! Go on!" This was the whole assembly as a matter of fact, and I said, "Oh, I can't go on. I have to talk about some other books, but I'm sure you've got this book in the library here and if you want it, why don't you go up to the library and get it out and finish it?"

I went up to the library after my talk to have lunch with the librarian. I got there before she did and a whole stream of little boys and girls came in, but I was particularly interested to notice on the shelf five copies of the Jungle Book. Two little boys came in and they grabbed up three copies and I heard one say, "I guess this will hold us." Then there were two left and those disappeared immediately, and then there was a clamor and I said, "They're all gone. But why don't you go up to the desk and get a piece of paper and write your names and what class you're in, and in the order in which your names appear, the teacher will let you know when the books come in and then you can read them yourself." There was a long line clear out to the end of the library room to the doorway and beyond of children wanting to read the Jungle Book. Now, absolutely all I had done was read a little bit of it aloud and leave it at a cliff-hanging moment.

While I was standing there, the daughter of one of the women that worked in our place came. That was Thelma Grant Sandon's daughter. Jackie I had known since she was born. She had a little friend with her and she brought her up and introduced me. They were in the sixth grade and you could see that Jackie was very pleased that she knew me, the speaker, and she wanted me to meet her friend. Her friend was trying to let me know that she was trying to make conversation. She said to me, "My mother wants me to read classics." She said it in a tone I cannot reproduce, but it was as if she were proud of her mother for wanting her to read classics but determined that she wasn't going to. I don't know how to explain it exactly but that was the feeling I got. So I said to her, "Do you know what a classic is?"

They both sort of straightened up and she said, "What?"

Hawkins: I said, "A classic is just a book that's so good and is so interesting that people read it now even though it's an old, old book and has been in print a long time. But it's still so interesting that people still read it. Now, when people stop reading it, it's no longer a classic. It just dies. But any time it's still read and it's still enjoyed, that is a classic, even though it's an old, old book."

"Well," said this little girl, "I think I'd like to read classics."
 [Laughs]

Maguire: She had thought classic was synonymous with boring.

Hawkins: It couldn't be anything else. So it's a question of semantics lots of times.

Authors of Children's Books

Maguire: We were going to discuss Book Week activites.

Hawkins: Oh, yes, the Book Week activities.

Maguire: I think you had mentioned some authors.

Hawkins: Did I tell you about what happened at that meeting--about the author that didn't want to come because she thought--Well, she called me and she said that she didn't want to be on the same program with the person who had recommended her, Howard Pease. She didn't think his books and her books were compatible.

I said, "Of course, I'll put you on with someone else," and so I put her with Inglis Fletcher who had just done a children's book, The White Leopard. She hadn't yet started on her long line of historical novels that made her a very popular author in a later time. Inglis was an old friend of mine. We didn't call her Inglis, we called her Peggy. I had asked her to come for dinner that Saturday night.

I got the programs printed and sent out and, of course, I sent one to this author. She called me up and she said she was sorry she couldn't come and talk at all because she didn't want to be on the same program with this author. I said I was terribly sorry but by this time I was a little provoked. She said she didn't want to be on the program with her because she was a worldly woman.

Well, I was taken aback and I said, "Of course, Mrs. So-and-So, if you feel that way, I'm sorry and we'll take your name off. However, I am sure there will be a number of people who are disappointed because it's too late to let them know. The lists have gone out. There are

Hawkins: going to be a lot of people who will come expecting to hear you, and they will be disappointed when you are not on the program. But I quite understand how you feel."

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

Hawkins: She said, "That's right. I hadn't realized that, of course, there will be people there who want to hear me. Maybe I could come if you see to it that I don't meet this author."

I said, "Yes, I'll arrange that you don't have to meet her so you can come."

I told Peggy this story knowing that she would understand and she was absolutely intrigued. She said, "Oh, I'm dying to see this person who thinks I'm a worldly woman!"

On the day of the program--I have been trying my best to remember whether I arranged it for Peggy to speak first, and I think that that is what I did and that Mrs. So-and-So was going to talk afterwards. Peggy said such complimentary things about her books that this author was very pleased and gave a very good talk and stayed and wanted to meet Peggy.

Maguire: Did they actually meet?

Hawkins: Yes, she met her. She wanted to meet her. But I wasn't having her for dinner. I was afraid that things might upset her. The funny part of it was that this author that I'm speaking of was an extremely good author. Her books were absolutely tops.

The fact that a person is a good writer does not mean that that person isn't a difficult person to handle. Authors are very often quite difficult as most publishers will tell you. I, being an author as well as a bookseller, know both sides. I know what the bookseller thinks and what the author thinks.

The author always thinks that his books are not appreciated and that there's never been enough money spent on advertising of his book. There's not been enough showing of his books. Even a person with as much of a name as Sinclair Lewis was not immune to that. He came by Sather Gate Book Shop one time and came in and complained because his books weren't in the window, although he had no brand new book at the moment. I tried to tell him that we had his books in stock, but they just happened not to be in the window. But you never can tell how an author's ego is going to be hurt, and being an author I know how easy it is to hurt their egos.

Hawkins: On the other hand, when Victor Von Hagen and I did our first book [Quetzal Quest], I begged him when he went on a trip in the northwest not to go into bookstores. Talk to libraries if he wanted to, but stay away from bookstores. Of course, he went into every bookstore, and every bookseller there hated anything that either of us ever did because of his insistence on having publicity--He didn't know he was doing this. He was just trying to make a little publicity for his own books.

If the publisher brings you, that's one thing. But if you wander in of your own accord and then tell people how good you are, they aren't--Booksellers have more than one book to sell, and they are apt to be very cold towards an author, not always, but they can be. Authors can be a real trial, as I know.

Maguire: Was this a regular practice, having authors come to speak during Book Week?

Hawkins: That was one particular time. I often would have maybe one. That was the only time I had two authors every day of the week. I really exhausted my authors by that time! [Laughs] But this area is full of authors. There were many, many authors of children's books living in the Bay Area and some very fine ones too. Even now there are many.

Beverly Cleary,* by the way, worked for Sather Gate Book Shop at one time. She was a children's librarian, and she worked for us for a couple of years, I think, in the early part of World War II. Then she went in as a librarian into the army and was an army librarian. But this was before she had written any books. Then after the war She started writing books, and you know her books are tremendously popular. This year one of her books received a Newbery** honor award. It just nearly had it.

*Beverly Bunn Cleary, born in 1916, began writing children's books in 1950. Her humorous stories have enjoyed tremendous popularity, and she has received several awards.

**This prestigious award, named for British bookseller John Newbery, has been bestowed annually since 1922 on the most distinguished children's book published in the United States during the previous year; it is awarded by the Children's Services Division of the American Library Association.

Decision to Work for the UC Press

Maguire: I wanted to talk about your job at the UC [University of California] Press. This was around 1954?

Hawkins: Yes, I went in in August, I think, of 1954 and I left in July 1961. So I had about seven years' work there. It was a mistake in one way because I was not very happy at the Press, but in another way it was an extremely good experience for me.

I had reached a stage where I felt that I needed something to make me more alert to books--to grow. I had come to sort of a plateau. At this particular time, I was about to lose Jeanne-Marie Lee as an assistant due to a discussion over salaries. The powers that be and she couldn't agree, and I begged them to keep her because I was then buyer, and I needed her very much. There wasn't anybody experienced enough to take her place. In fact, I don't remember clearly, but I have a feeling we hadn't anybody really for second in command at all, and it was getting on toward Christmas time. It was the last of August, the beginning of September, and that's about the time we were getting in our fall books.

Maguire: She was actually doing some buying in the children's department?

Hawkins: She was helping. She sat in on the buying. I did the actual buying, but she could make suggestions and if I agreed with her, I certainly took her suggestions. I had been training her for some time to be able to do the buying in case I was ill or anything so that she could handle it, and she was doing the buying of the stock. I allowed her to do that because I wanted her to have the experience.

So I was having dinner with a friend of mine who was sales and promotion manager at the Press and she needed an assistant. She began describing what the job was, someone to write copies for jackets--"blurbs" as we call them in the trade--and someone to call on some of the bookstores and to help with the selling and to write ads and that sort of thing. So I said, "That sounds as if you're talking about me."

She said, "You wouldn't consider coming would you?"

I said, "It never occurred to me." I wasn't thinking about it, but I was feeling upset over this business about Jeanne-Marie so my friend said she'd talk to the boss about it.

Hawkins: They offered me the first step in the pay, and it was only thirty-five dollars a month more than I was getting. I told her that I wouldn't think of leaving Sather Gate Book Shop for thirty-five dollars a month. She was so eager to have someone that she offered me--or the boss there, Mr. Frugé offered me the second step. I've forgotten how much it was now, but I think it was a little over four hundred dollars a month. I had been making about \$350 and this was quite a bit more.

I said, "I've got to talk to Mr. Kahn, and I will not leave if they pay me the same amount that you offer me." So I went to tell Mr. Kahn and he said that if I felt I had to do it, why, of course, that was my business, but would I please talk to him in the morning. I talked to him at his home. I was very disturbed emotionally about this because I loved my work, and I couldn't quite see why I was doing this except I was upset over Jeanne-Marie not being kept on for ten dollars a month more than they wanted to give her.

Maguire: So it wasn't that you were tired of the work you did at Sather Gate?

Hawkins: No, no. I was on a plateau as far as growing was concerned, that I realized. I wasn't expanding. It was pretty much work I knew how to do, and I was sort of treading water a little bit.

But that really wasn't it. What it really was was that I felt I had been undercut by not being given support that I needed. Buying was a tough job and, of course, when I was given the job as buyer, I told Bill Garrett that I couldn't do it alone, that I needed very much to have him help me with the adult buying because I had never done any buying for adult books.

He, of course, sat in with the adult buying and we bought together. I never, never tried to do it all by myself because I felt that certainly when it came to stock, he knew what to get. He'd say, "Get thirty-five copies of The Prophet by Gibran," and I would say, "My, that's a lot," and we'd sell twenty-five copies in no time. In fact, I think he said to get seventy-five copies, as I remember it now. He was excellent. He knew very well what we could use.

I liked my work. It wasn't by any means because I didn't like it, but I felt I couldn't go on unless I had help that was proper. I was vulnerable, you might say.

The next day Mr. Kahn and Mrs. Herbert talked to me. Mrs. Herbert had a friend, who was in the office in the university, who had access to what the salaries were. When they offered me the first step--the exact amount that the first step was on the job that I had been offered--I was really so upset to have them think that for that amount of money that I would leave them, that I couldn't talk. I was surprised.

Hawkins: When I said that that wasn't enough, they didn't say, "What are you being offered?" They didn't make any gesture and I couldn't bring myself to say, "If you'll pay me so much I'll stay." And I would have. I would have right then and there.

Maguire: Did they know what was behind any temptation on your part to go to the Press? Did they know that you felt you needed some more help?

Hawkins: I had made it very clear that I felt that they made a mistake not to keep Jeanne-Marie. So I accepted the job and, of course, then they had to hire Jeanne-Marie because there was nobody else. Then I think Mr. Garret became the buyer of the adult books. He was quite competent and I know did a very good job.

But that's how I left Sather Gate Book Shop, and I left on two weeks notice. I took a vacation before I started the new job. I went up to Heritage House near Little River in Sonoma County and spent the week there and did the book list, the check list, for the Chronicle.

Years with the UC Press

Hawkins: Then I went to the Press. I stayed there six years but it was not a happy time. It wasn't really the kind of work that I was geared for. I missed contact with the librarians and all of that, although I did have some contacts with librarians. I did go to meetings like the California Library Association meetings and things of that sort. And I did assemble and handle various exhibits for conventions held locally. I was in charge of exhibits. For instance, when the American Medical Association met in San Francisco, the University Presses would have a combined exhibit of their books. Yale, Harvard, Columbia and other university presses would send exhibits out to us, and the Stanford University Press and the University of California Press would run the exhibit together. Things like that. I enjoyed it.

But I was just simply not in the right place. It wasn't my cup of tea, really. I found writing blurbs for scholarly books very difficult. I found scholarly books, many times, somewhat dull with lots of jargon that only experts understood. To try to write jackets wasn't something I knew much about. I was greatly helped by Lucy Dobbie who was one of the main editors. She was extremely kind to me. Harold Small, when he finally accepted me as working for the Press, became very friendly.

Maguire: Were these very specialized books?

Hawkins: Oh, in those days, yes, very specialized. Some of them were not, of course. Some of them were really quite interesting for the general public, such as the catalogue for Morris Graves which was a beautiful book. They had some very fine books, there was no question about it.

But, I grew. I learned a lot in a very hard way. I really learned a great deal and I'm grateful for it, although I didn't have a very good time. I was overpaid and I didn't produce as much as I should have. I was just in the wrong place, and I was too old to cut my losses and try to get another job, so I hung on until they eased me out.

Decision to Return to Sather Gate

Hawkins: It was one of the best things that ever happened to me because my blood pressure went down immediately from 236 over 110 to nearly normal. I went back to Sather Gate Book Shop. I was contemplating a part-time job at the Sierra Club which Mr. Frugé had suggested I might do, but it was very obvious to me that this was going to be a full-time job at half-job pay, and I didn't want to get involved in it.

Maguire: Had you kept up contact with Sather Gate Book Shop?

Hawkins: Well, not very much. I saw them sometimes. I dropped in occasionally. But I got a telephone call from Fred Potter who was then the buyer--well, he was more than the buyer. He was more or less running the shop. Mr. Kahn was the president, but Mr. Potter was pretty much in charge, and he asked me to lunch. When I had lunch with him he said, "I understand you're thinking of leaving the Press."

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Would you consider coming back to Sather Gate Book Shop? We could use you in so many ways I can hardly mention them."

I said I would consider it, so he offered me as much as I had gotten before--no more, as a matter of fact! [Laughs] But I knew that I would have to take a cut in salary. I said I was offered at the Sierra Club for three days a week as much as he offered me. I said I couldn't take it for that because I could get the half-time job for that.

Then he did come up and offered me more. Within a month after that I got a fifty dollar a month raise, so that I was getting about half what I was getting at the Press, but it was better than what I had been getting when working with Sather Gate Book Shop previously.

Hawkins: I didn't want Miss Lee to think that I was trying to run her or in any way be any kind of a burden to her. I asked Mr. Potter if he would give me some title that would make her understand what I was because people were asking me what I was going to do. Mr. Kahn suggested that I be called Consultant in Library Services and Book Fairs.

Book Fairs

Hawkins: So I took over the book fairs, the Sather Gate book fairs, and that was a very interesting job--a lot of work. Sarah Jencks worked with me a good deal of the time. We had about, oh, I can't remember now, several identical fairs that were sent out and we took orders from the books. We'd send the fairs out and then the books--[tape interruption: door bell rings].

We'd make a list of books, arranged for the different age groups. For instance, we'd have maybe twenty-five or thirty books for one age group. We had about three hundred books in a book fair. We'd send them out. The customer would return the books prepaid and we would pay transportation to send the books. Then we would give them a ten percent discount from the list price and those people who ran the book fair would take orders for the books and collect the money and give us the book order. We would then send them the books they ordered, the number of copies of each title that was ordered. Not every title was ordered, of course. Sometimes a title would not sell and sometimes one copy of a book would sell.

The amount of money taken in by the different fair chairmen would vary from say, two hundred dollars to four or five thousand dollars. One private school made most of their money for their library on the book fair and their book fair committee really worked at it. They worked for months and they knew what they wanted. They came over and made a good selection of titles they wanted to sell. They knew what they wanted, and each different person on the committee had a different area to check on.

After a while, after a certain number of years--I guess it was three or four years, maybe five years that we did book fairs--gradually we cut out the book fairs that were not profitable. We just stayed with this one book fair because they sold five or six thousand dollars worth of books. That was more than the whole combined rest of them and was much better. But the book fairs were good publicity, and if the people were properly interested and worked hard enough they could sell quite a few books.

Maguire: Was this something you just jumped right into?

Hawkins: Well, they had been doing it before I came back to Sather Gate Book Shop. It was already under way and I just organized it into something that was definite. It worked out pretty well.

Maguire: How did you learn how to go about organizing a book fair?

Hawkins: Well, we did pretty much what they had been doing but we mimeographed the list, for instance, and sent the same books. We had, I guess, four book fairs--two were identical and two others were identical--and we kept those four sets going.

There was quite a lot of logistics involved, so that this book fair came back in time. We had to count the books and check them and see that they were all there before we sent them out to the next fair, because that's the only way we could know whom to charge if there was a missing book. That took quite a good deal of time because you would get three hundred books and have to check them title by title, then repack them and then send them off again.

And there was an overlap. You had to be sure to know which collection was going to which fair. We had a schedule and worked it. We did it, I guess, for about four or five years and then we gradually dropped. At the end we just had the one.

Maguire: How many schools would have these book fairs going at one time?

Hawkins: We would have them staggered so that book fair number one was delegated to go to this school, and this school, and this school, and this school, and book fair number two was going to this school, this school, and this school, so that you knew which library or which school was going to get which fair. But you had to arrange it with the times so that number one would be back in time to go to the next school or library, because number two went out at a different time and it came back at a different time, and it went out again at a different time. But you had to arrange it so there'd be a few days lapse between when they came in and went out so that you could have time to check the books in and send them out again.

Maguire: How many accounts did you have?

Hawkins: Oh, we'd send out as many as twenty-seven fairs during a season or twenty or maybe fifteen. It depended. In some years it was more than others.

Maguire: How was the work delegated for, say, one book fair The school would have a committee and that committee would take care of the publicity?

Hawkins: Yes, supposedly, and if they did a good job, then they sold a lot of books and if they didn't do a good job--it flopped. Often they didn't give themselves enough lead time. Most of them didn't realize that you have to prepare for months ahead, that you have to be working on it--getting posters ready, and getting people to know that they're to come out, and seeing that the date picked is a good time and that people know that they aren't going to take the books away with them but are going to be sent the books later. For the last fairs of the season that went out, we would let them sell the books right then if they wanted to, and they were charged with the books that they didn't return.

Maguire: After a book fair, you would get an order for a certain number of books and then you would deliver those books. You took those books from your stock?

Hawkins: Yes.

Maguire: So you didn't order from the publisher?

Hawkins: No, no. We tried to guess which books would sell the best and have enough stock on hand. We didn't always. The book that I remember we were really fooled on and the publishers were, too--they were out of stock at the publishers as well--was Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl. It sold tremendously. One school sold forty-two copies and another school sold fifty copies and one school sold sixty copies. Of course, we had quite a few copies, but they went out immediately and we reordered it. We knew by the first fairs that we were going to have a big sale, but when we got the order in, the publishers were out of stock and we had to wait. It was almost Christmas before the book came in. It was very discouraging.

Maguire: Were the book fairs worth the effort, all in all?

Hawkins: We decided, eventually, they weren't, that there wasn't sufficient return--except the big book fair. Marin Country Day School, the one that sold so much. They were wonderful to work with, too, because they really knew what they were doing. They'd come over and select books. They sold expensive books. They sold adult books as well as children's books, and they worked at it. They had a collection they called "Temptations." They would take fairly expensive books and they'd sell five, ten, fifteen copies of a twenty-five dollar book.

Maguire: But this was not the usual practice? You usually selected the books for the schools?

Hawkins: They were not different in the sense that we didn't send them a lot of copies of a title. We sent one copy and they took orders. But they had a much larger selection and they made their own selection, not our selection. The other fairs, we selected.

The Combined Book Exhibit

Maguire: I read an article you wrote for the California School Libraries in 1965 ["Book Fairs: The Librarian's Curse or Chance?" in California School Libraries, 36, No.4 (May 1965), 5-8]. There were several other articles in that issue on book fairs, and they were by people who worked in organizations such as Books On Exhibit. There was also an article by someone who worked for the Combined Book Exhibit. Could you comment on these organizations?

Hawkins: The Combined Book Exhibit, I know. The other one I don't know. But the Combined Book Exhibit usually was sent to libraries or to big meetings like, oh, ALA [American Library Association] or California Library Association or in the East, similar organizations, or sometimes was sent to big libraries. These were books that were selected by different publishers, and they'd pay so much to have their book included in the Combined Book Exhibit. Instead of exhibiting in their own booth, as many of the big publishers do, the Combined Book Exhibit would show their books. This was a fine way for small publishers to be able to show their titles when they couldn't possibly afford to send a salesman and pay the cost of a booth and all of that.

The Combined Book Exhibit is something that is an excellent thing and libraries and librarians value it. Many times you'll see an acquisitions librarian, that is someone who is doing the book selecting, spending hours at the exhibit checking on books that they might not be able to see otherwise. That isn't quite like book fairs. In fact, I wouldn't put it in the same category.

Maguire: Your own selection of books in these book fairs were all hard cover books?

Hawkins: There were mostly hard cover. I don't know, they may have paperbacks showing now. Last time I saw them, they had a section that was paperback, but mostly there were hardback.

But the Combined Book Exhibit was an opportunity for a small publisher to get his books in front of the public that might be interested in them.

[end tape 1, side 2; end of Interview III]

CHAPTER IV

[Interview: March 9, 1978]
[begin tape 1, side 1]

Maguire: We're now off the subject of book fairs but still are talking about wholesaling. I wondered if you could give me an estimate of how many institutions the Sather Gate Book Shop did business with, how many libraries.

Hawkins: Several hundred. It's hard to say how many because I never counted them, but I know there were several hundred.

Maguire: That was all northern California?

Hawkins: We even had some business in southern California. After Vroman's went out of business, we covered the whole area. We didn't go beyond California though. We didn't make any effort to go beyond California. But we had customers as far north as Crescent City and Yreka, and we had customers as far south as Chula Vista, not always the same ones.

Purchasing Practices in Schools

Hawkins: But we had many, many schools. We used to serve the public libraries and the county libraries but they gradually drifted away, and our business became more and more school business, especially as the ESEA* funds became available. Then, of course, was the time when all the publishers jumped into making thousands more children's books. There

*Through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, federal funds were granted to schools for the acquisition of school library resources, textbooks, and other instructional materials.

Hawkins: were far too many books being published to my way of thinking, because almost anything could be sold to schools, unfortunately.

I always had a very high standard for what I sold to schools, but I know one book salesman of a publisher came to a school that had four thousand dollars to spend. He got the whole four thousand dollars for his company and sold them books that were highly inappropriate, because there was a certain naivete amongst those who were not librarians. Schools that had a professional librarian usually had a very much better spending of their money. Too many times the principal would be the one who bought the books, and almost never did they have any idea of what to buy.

I remember I went into one school in northern California--it was a very small town--and I went to the principal, and I said that we had some books and he said, "Well, we don't buy books regularly, only when we need them." That was just an indication. Then he took me out and showed me a bookcase. They had bought some bookcases, and they were filled with the crummiest books you have ever seen--dirty and unattractive--and he said, "We've got all these books, but nobody seems to be interested in them." I thought to myself, "Why would they be?" They were the dregs and there was nothing there. But imagine saying, "We don't buy books regularly."

Another time I was at another school where the principal liked me and wanted me to send him a list of books for purchase for his ESEA money. I said, "If you like, I'll send you an exhibit of books, and you can have your teachers look and decide which ones they'd like." Oh, no, he didn't want to bother with that, you see, which would be the ideal way: to send the books down and let them check them and see which ones would fit in with theirs. "No, no, you do it. You do the work."

I was conscientious. Others who would be in the same position might not be. But I did send a pretty balanced list. He had said to me, "We don't need any books on social studies. We have all the 'I Want To Be' series." These were little easy reading books about 'I want to be a policeman,' 'I want to be a garbage man,' 'I want to be a fire chief.' So he didn't want anything on social studies. They had those.

That kind of thing I ran into constantly. Or I would find in a high school that the typing teacher was the so-called librarian, and she had one or two periods a week that this so-called library would be open, a couple of bookcases, and that was considered a library. It was a terrible shock to me to see this as I went up and down the state.

Hawkins: I was horrified because I'd grown up in Spokane, Washington, which was a city of about 120,000. But the high school that I went to, which had about a thousand students, had a quite large library. It had a trained librarian, at least one, and I think two if I'm not mistaken. They had the texts separated completely from the library. In many schools the textbooks have to be handled by the person who handles the library. They were professional librarians, and the children were taught library use from the time they were freshmen. They had classes in library use with how to go about research. As a freshman you had to learn this before you were allowed to use the library, but when you did, you knew how to use the library to find out what you wanted to find out.

When I found all through California this lack of appreciation of the value of books and libraries, I was appalled. For a while, when the United States was giving money, librarians were hired, but when the money drifted away--This was supposed to be seed money to start them all, and right away the first ones thrown out were the librarians. It was really sad.

Maguire: About how much money did these funds provide for each school?

Hawkins: It was a grant sort of thing. They had to set up a request and they got so much, different ones. One person would get four thousand dollars in one school, and another one would get fifteen thousand dollars, and some would get twenty thousand dollars. But the way they purchased the books was not always the way it should be done. The money did get spent, but it didn't always get spent properly.

Once in awhile, book money would be channeled in other ways, not very often, but once in awhile that would happen. I remember in one case, they were very upset because they had been allowed so much to process each book, I think \$1.50 a book to process, and they made an arrangement with a county services to do it for 60¢ a book. They spent the balance of that money on carpets. Well, that was okay except that the county renegged on it, and then the school didn't have the money to have the books properly processed, so there they were. If they had waited to get the carpets until after they had the surplus, instead of spending it too soon they wouldn't have done it, probably. But that sort of thing sometimes happens..

Sather Gate's Road Salesman

Maguire: You mentioned earlier that Sather Gate employed a road salesman. What did the road salesman do?

Hawkins: He went around originally with fall books or spring books that were outstanding and showed them, and sold specific books. That justified getting book salesmen. But as we got bigger and bigger it became less possible. The amount of books published was greater, so what we began doing was to sell our services, what we could offer in the way of service. Inasmuch as our service was exceedingly poor at one time, it was very much difficult to sell it. [Laughs]

Maguire: This was after Vroman's went out of business.

Hawkins: Yes, before that, the orders that came in the morning were filled and sent out usually by afternoon, and the ones that came in the afternoon were sent out the next day, all that we had in stock. The other books within two days were ordered.

But after we got such quantities of orders, then it backed up and when I came back to Sather Gate Book Shop [see pp. 82-84] instead of being the way it was when I left, it was two months behind. In other words, they were pulling books that they received orders for two months before, and they hadn't begun to order the books they didn't have. So it was really fantastic.

We weren't the only ones that were in that case. The only difference really between our services and the others was that we cared tremendously whether we got them. We would go to a good deal of trouble to get a book for a customer, whereas some of the bigger jobbers* just wrote "cannot supply" because they didn't want to fool with it. They'd lose money on it.

*Jobbers--essentially wholesalers--buy from publishers and sell to retail booksellers or libraries.

Buying Wholesale Stock

Maguire: To move on to the subject of buying for the wholesale stock, I'm curious to find out how you became aware of all the various libraries' needs and interests.

Hawkins: Well, usually because I had pulled orders. You get so you know the different libraries and what they need. You know what a library needs. They need all the good reference books that are published, all of them. The bigger the library, the more they need, the more copies they need. The smaller the library, the more selective they must be--they would get only the best. Of course, the American Library Association made quite an effort to inform their members of the needs of a small library. They would say, "This purchase is for small libraries."

You saw what the salesmen had to offer you, and you chose with the idea of whether you thought this book would have a sale in a library, or if it was something that would have retail sale, because you bought both for the wholesale and the retail. We didn't have separate buyer.

Selling to Librarians

Maguire: Still on the subject of selling to librarians, what was the procedure? Did the librarians come into the store?

Hawkins: In some cases, yes. We had a number of librarians who liked to come and pick the books off the shelves, and very many of the other wholesalers did not like this. It was an interruption. The ones that really liked to buy from the shelves would often come to us because we would allow them to go and pick books off the shelves.

Then we had a biller, Themla Grant Sandon, who billed from the books for the customer. Then we'd send the books out, or they'd take them with them if they wanted to wait, but often they didn't. But on the other hand, there were other librarians who just sent in orders and they'd usually specify which editions were wanted.

Computers in Bookshops

Hawkins: When we got our computer, we had to translate all the orders into computer language. I think that it slowed us up tremendously because a computer will only take a very limited amount of information, the kind that we had at any rate. It wasn't a data processing system--which I don't know anything about--but this computer had cards. You could get just so many characters on a card, and you couldn't get a lot of information. If you had a book that had be a special edition and a special this, that, or the other, it was very hard.

All of the orders had to be edited before they could be put on cards, and that used to consume a great deal of time. The buyers would be going through the daily orders and editing to get them properly arranged so they could be found on the shelves. So they were put in by author and sorted by publisher. Oh, dear!

The first time Xerox did Books in Print--the Xerox people bought it--they thought all you had to do was just turn a clerk loose on a catalog. You couldn't find anything in that Books in Print. One book was listed only under "vols. 3," and then it had the author and the title. Nobody in the world would have ever looked under "vols." They had under "stories," sometimes a book titled "Stories of the Eerie" and "Stories of the Ghostly" and stories of this or that or the other. They had a heading, "stories, see author." [Laughs] You just have no idea. After the first one they had to put out a whole volume almost two inches thick of corrections, and even then they didn't get all of them. It was incredible.

Things that have to do with books require intelligence and that's just all there is to it. Books are not bolts and nuts. They're not cabbages. They are individual. Each book is an individual book, and it has to be treated as that. Computers just do not do well in that kind of situation.

Maguire: When did that happen, that Sather Gate acquired a computer?

Hawkins: When we moved down to Emeryville [1963]. They had had some computer before, but not as an elaborate a one as they had then. But the worst part of it was that when anything went wrong with the computer, everything stopped until it was fixed. There was nothing that could be done.

Maguire: Did it happen often?

Hawkins: It happened enough so that you could have maybe three days work pile up on you and you never catch up.

Maguire: Was it expensive?

Hawkins: Very expensive. Oh, I have yet to be convinced that computers are the thing for books. [Laughs]

Maguire: The UC Berkeley library is just on its way to being computerized right now!

Librarians

Maguire: I had heard that you offered very special and personalized services to your wholesale customers, such as meeting their planes, taking them to coffee, taking them to lunch and so forth.

Hawkins: Oh yes, if they needed it. Of course, a great many of the people who came in, came in by car. But I always would take them to lunch if they were going to be there a whole day, just as a courtesy, and usually the librarians were friends of mine. I liked them very much. Mother once said she wished I'd look at her the way I look at librarians. [Laughs]

There were very few librarians that I didn't like. I always felt that they were a remarkable group of women, mostly women. Of course, there are more men librarians now. But when I was concerned, there were fewer than there are now. The ones that were men were very good friends too.

Oh, I knew some of the oldtimers. I knew Mabel Gillis, who was the state librarian, and I knew Jessie Lea and Harriet Davids. I can't list all of the nice librarians that I knew. They were extremely interesting. They were talking one time about the early days. One librarian used to ride horseback down in the Big Sur country, carrying books in saddle bags, bringing them to the people in the country, things like that. Nothing stopped them. They would always try to get the books to the patron. Get a couple of the oldtime librarians talking about the early days in the twenties--and earlier than that, in the teens, 1918, 19, 20 and up through the early thirties. It was very interesting. Lots of roads weren't through, and the only way they could get there was in a truck or on horseback.

Acquiring New Customers

Maguire: How did you yourself acquire new customers for the wholesale department?

Hawkins: I'd call on different places that I hadn't called on before. For instance, I would start off and I'd go maybe only seventy-five miles in a day, but I would cover--All through the area that I was going through, I would try to go to every school district that was there to find out who bought the books. I'd call on our customers, but then I'd call on other school districts if I passed through there and try to get them interested.

Maguire: How did you do that?

Hawkins: Go in and see the buyer, whoever did the buying, whether it was the purchasing agent or a librarian, or whether it was the typing teacher or whoever, and try to persuade them that they needed books and to buy them from us and that we would help them in every way we could.

We gave them a pretty good discount, although it didn't sound as if it were. I explained to you how the discounts were not always as they seem. [see pp. 54-55] But it was a personal matter. It was getting to know them and getting to know their needs, and trying to ride herd on the orders as much as possible yourself. If I got a letter from a librarian that was complaining about service, I'd try and check up to see what had gone wrong, and, if possible, tighten up the situation so that they'd get their books more promptly.

Bookselling Parties

Maguire: Did advertising play much of a role?

Hawkins: We didn't do a great deal of advertising in magazines or papers or anything like that. Our advertising was usually going to library meetings. Now, for a long time, we didn't take a booth at a library meeting. I would actually go to the meetings and then I would give a party. It became quite the thing eventually, a party in the hotel room wherever I was, and I'd get the librarians to help me. The men librarians would come in, and I'd set them to work being bartenders. I might say that librarians as a rule were pretty husky drinkers. They were not the prissy people that so many people think librarians are.

Hawkins: I remember one time we had a party for the California Library Association meeting at the Fairmont Hotel. After the party we were coming down in an elevator and everybody was laughing and talking, and one of the occupants of the elevator said, "What group is this and what is the occasion?" The sister of one of the librarians said, "Oh, don't you know? This is the day the librarians don't whisper!" [Laughs]

But they always had a great time. At first, I did it out of my room and had people coming and going. A woman in this field was a little bit odd, had a little more difficult situation than the men salesmen to the booksellers; that is, the publisher salesmen would have parties that went on far into the night. But I didn't feel that I could do that sort of thing. In the first place, I didn't feel like spending that much of the firm's money and in the second place, I didn't see any necessity for it.

So I took to getting a space that was big enough and inviting everybody to come between 5 and 7 p.m. and bring his or her staff, and that was one thing I always did. I knew the head librarians, but I always asked them to bring their staff. I later on heard that many, many people had noticed this. They'd say, "Sure, all the head librarians get invited everywhere at these meetings, and the staff gets left behind. I always remembered that when I wasn't in a big position, it was nice to be included in some of the parties that publisher salesmen would give, and I always was very pleased. I learned quite a little bit about bookselling going to these parties.

So I always tried to include the staff, and later on I heard from several people. "You don't remember," they'd say, "but you invited me (this would be a head librarian) to come to your party when I was just beginning. I had just started library work." It paid off just in courtesy, in being agreeable and being nice.

I remember one librarian who left the library field, who came back later and she said to me, "You know, Quail, I'll never forget the time that I came and I told you that I was leaving the library field and you took me out to dinner. I never forgot that, and I realized that you really liked me or you wouldn't have done that."

When she came back [laughs], there was nobody that was more firmly my friend. But it was genuine. I wouldn't have asked her if I hadn't really liked her and found her an interesting person.

It was the same way with one of the men librarians. I heard afterward when he said to me--he had just come back from the war, and this was the first time he had come to a library meeting since he had come back. I set him to work being a bartender. He said, "You know, I was so grateful. You gave me something to do, and I

Hawkins: got to see all these people again." I wasn't trying to help him particularly. I needed his help, but it just so happened that he was very delighted to be included and asked to do something.

I just treated the librarians as if they were my friends, which I felt they were, and I never tried to influence them as far as playing on my friendship with them. Always it was a business deal. If they thought we gave good service--and I thought we gave as good as the others and, in fact, better; although bad as it sometimes was, it was better than the services of some of the others.

Maguire: They never felt that your friendship was simply to acquire and keep their business?

Hawkins: No, they didn't, and that has made the difference I think. I remember one time--early, before we did have a booth at these meetings--I overheard one librarian saying to another, "She comes to our meetings and she doesn't have to!" But I was really interested. I was interested in librarianship, and I was interested in what I could do to help.

My work was my passion in a sense. It wasn't just a job. It was something that was very important to me. My relation with my customers was not just business. It was a feeling that I was in a work in which it was very important to see that good books were available from as many sources as possible. And I was helping to distribute books.

Maguire: Did you have membership in any of these library associations?

Hawkins: Oh, yes. The firm, Sather Gate Book Shop, belonged to all of them and I represented the firm.

Maguire: Did you speak at any of these conventions?

Hawkins: Well, I never keep my mouth shut you know. I spoke if I felt the necessity. I was certainly never put down. I was always allowed a voice if I had something to say. I remember when I went to the University of California Press, I was introduced by the state librarian, whom I knew. She said, "Quail Hawkins from Sather--oh, I beg your pardon, from the University of California Press." [Laughs] She said, "I'm not used to it yet!"

Business Trips

Maguire: I understand that you traveled rather extensively during this time?

Hawkins: Yes, at the time I came back to Sather Gate Book Shop [in 1961, after working for the UC Press for six years] I did a lot of traveling. Before that I did go to meetings after 1944. I just went to meetings but I didn't do any traveling. But after I came back, I would be gone six weeks at a time. I would go south and then come back, and I would stay here about a week and then I'd go north. I would, as I say, go about seventy-five miles a day. I'd go up one way and come back another.

I always would stop about 4:30 because no school or library wants to see you after 4:00 really. [Laughs] But I was dead. I would call on about eight customers a day, four in the morning and four in the afternoon. I never stayed long at any place because people were busy, and I didn't want to come and interrupt them.

Maguire: It must have involved quite a bit of planning, too, before you took the trip.

Hawkins: Oh, yes, you had to know where you were going, and very seldom did I go to a place I didn't already expect to go to.

Maguire: Did you plan the trips yourself or did you get together with other staff members?

Hawkins: No, I just did it myself. We didn't have enough staff members to discuss it with. I'd talk with Mr. Potter and Mr. Kahn if there was a question of whether they wanted me to go here or there, but mostly it was left up to me. That was one reason it was such an interesting job, because you could make your own decisions.

Also, Sather Gate was not a rich firm and I was on an expense account. Nobody ever said, "You can only have this much or that much," but I've always felt that I had a responsibility to my firm, and I never spent money that I wouldn't have spent of my own money if I were in a like situation. If I were staying someplace, I would not stay at the most expensive place.

The only time I'd stay over at a place that might be expensive was when that was where the meeting was being held. It was always very wise to be at the same place the meeting was because you were available very easily, and you could have your party and everybody could come easily.

Hawkins: In later years, we discontinued the parties because they became too heavy a drain on us financially. I suggested that we stop. Too many of the libraries were our friends but weren't buying from us. When we'd give a party, they'd all come but it was not producing any business. In other words, what the parties were intended for was a thank you for doing business with us. When they weren't doing business there was no thank you involved, and so I felt there was no point in it.

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

At any rate, we stopped doing so much with public libraries. There wasn't much chance to get anything back. So gradually we did more and more school business

Maguire: But the trips as a whole were worthwhile efforts?

Hawkins: Yes.

Maguire: But you met so many people per day.

Hawkins: Well, I'd be very tired at night, I can tell you. I'd come back from work, and I'd throw myself on the bed and lie there for about fifteen or twenty minutes without moving. Then I'd get up and get myself a glass of ice water and sit and read for an hour or so. And then just before I'd go to dinner, I'd get myself a little drink and have it in my room. I didn't like to go out, being a lone woman.

If I were alone, if it was an area where I wasn't having dinner with someone, I would then do that, and then I'd come back right after dinner and go to bed. I would be far too tired to do any writing up or anything of that sort. I would get up early in the morning and do that then; I would send my daily letter in the morning. I would read. Of course, I was never too tired to read because I wasn't sleepy. I was just exhausted, and I just loved to have the privacy of my motel room when I was on a trip.

Publishing: Changes Since World War II

Maguire: Regarding Sather Gate's and your own contact with publishers during this time, I'm interested in whether things have changed very much since before World War II.

Hawkins: Well, it did change quite a bit, of course. Before World War II, I did buying in the store, but we didn't have the volume of business that we had later on. We were in an entirely different situation. We bought much bigger quantities than we did before the war.

Maguire: Did the publishers themselves vary much with regard to service and discounts?

Hawkins: Oh, yes. Of course as computers came in, things got worse and worse. It was very funny. One time the Random House salesman said to me, "Well, Quail, we've put in computers and now the books you used to get in two weeks, you'll get in a month."

I said, "I guess so. Why do you think so?"

He said, "Because there are more people and more books." [Laughs] I think that probably is the answer. There are more people and more books.

As you can see, I'm not computer-minded. I'm just an old fogey! Even the British Museum has now put computers in their library. Well, computers are all right for certain things and I suppose valuable, but I haven't found them--At least the way Sather Gate's was set up was not satisfactory as far as I was concerned. There might have been an arrangement that would be good.

But I know that bills from publishers can be very difficult to interpret. I remember my brother (who was the one who died recently) was a direct salesman for schools and libraries for G.P. Putnam. He used to get plaintive letters from the librarians saying, please, would they indicate the titles on the bill so they'd know what books they were getting.

Maguire: They didn't do that?

Hawkins: You couldn't tell when you matched a book with an invoice whether that was the book that you were being billed for.

Maguire: That's rather amazing that they wouldn't indicate the titles.

Hawkins: They'd put a symbol which was fine as far as the company was concerned because they knew what that symbol meant---B-10-101 or something like that. That would indicate a certain title, as far as they were concerned. But to the person who got this bill, \$8.50 or \$7.95 or whatever, they couldn't accept it unless the book had the price in it, and they could match up a \$7.95 with a \$7.95 and that's all. If it didn't happen to have a price in it--and they didn't know that they were being billed for that particular book.

Maguire: If several books had identical prices--

Hawkins: Or sometimes prices changed so rapidly that a \$7.95 book might now have a new price of \$8.95. But it wouldn't be reflected in the book that you had in your hand, and you didn't have any way of being sure that you were getting the right book. It's not easy.

Post-war Discounting Practices

Maguire: Did the publishers vary much with regard to discounts?

Hawkins: To some extent, but really discounts were pretty much--Before World War II, a forty percent discount was average for a bookstore. But if you were doing wholesaling, you usually got a little more discount if you bought a lot of books. It was based on the quantity that you bought. But forty-eight percent discount was considered a very high discount, and I assume that it still is considered a high discount.

Maguire: You mentioned that the computers were a problem in dealing with the publishers, but how about the people themselves? Did they change much since the war?

Hawkins: Well, you had more salesmen because there were more publishing houses. I might add that looking at Publishers' Weekly today, I'm amazed at the new publishers whose names I've never heard of that are coming in. Of course, there's consolidation. There's tremendous change in publishing because so many publishers are now owned by big corporations. They're just part of a conglomerate.

For instance, you take Alfred Knopf as an example. It was a family owned business. Because of the inheritance taxes and laws, if you own a business and you die, your heirs have to pay on what the business is worth and it's taxed, and they sometimes have to sell the business in order to pay the tax on it. It's an extremely difficult situation.

Hawkins: If it's made into a corporation, not just the family, then there's a different situation. Many get bought by another firm in order to be incorporated. Random House bought Knopf, and then Random House was bought. I'm not sure, I think it was the Grace Lines--but I may be wrong on that, maybe RCA, I think now. But at any rate, it was a big conglomerate that bought Random House, who had bought Knopf. So you see, it was just a bigger fish eating a little fish, and a bigger fish eating the two, and that's what it amounts to now.

There are a great many more publishers now coming in (new ones), and the same thing will happen to them. The old ones get absorbed and then, eventually, they are all considered for their value as money-makers. The whole idea of publishing because it was a gentleman's business is gone completely. It's purely commercial now. The little ones that really care about books are trying to make a go of it. Whether they do or not I don't know because it costs so much to print and bind books. However, they do IBM printing now and things like that so they don't have to have cold type. So there's always--it certainly is in tremendous flux. And IBM printing may be the way to use computers.

Maguire: I would guess that you wouldn't have the same friendships that you'd had with the publishers when the firms were smaller.

Hawkins: I honestly don't know. I've been out of it just long enough so I don't know what the situation is now in the relation of the buyer to the salesman.

But more and more of old book firms have disappeared and new ones are coming up. There was one in Boston that was originally the Personal Bookshop which became Campbell and Hall. Then it was bought by somebody and it was a very, very good firm. It was bought by somebody and apparently, I had been told, they looted it and it disappeared.

Maguire: In the late sixties, say, when you were still with Sather Gate, you still knew quite a few of the publishers.

Hawkins: Oh, yes, certainly. I didn't do the buying so I didn't know them as well as I had but I met them.

Billing

Maguire: When did Sather Gate bill its wholesale customers?

Hawkins: Oh, they billed it as soon as they got the books, and they sent the bill with the books. They would send a statement at the end of the month. A statement, of course, was not a bill. It's just a statement of how much you owe, but the bill would have the names of the books on it and the prices and discount and total.

Maguire: Were you aware of how promptly Sather Gate was paid?

Hawkins: No, not very, unless I was looking up something special. Sometimes in the office, they'd ask me to check on some account that was very slow and find out why we weren't getting paid. Sometimes I'd find the situation was one of those bad situations where they bought more books than they could pay for. Once we lost quite a bit of money because one big library overspent their money. I'm sure Sather Gate Book Shop was never paid.

But dealing with school purchasing agents was even more frustrating to me sometimes. When some invoices were only partially paid for or not at all, finally I'd go to the district office to try to clear things up. You see, books were billed to the school district and sent directly with the books to the school ordering the books. The librarian at the school was supposed to check in the books, okay the invoices and send the invoices to the central office to be paid. Sometimes a school librarian would allow students to check in the books against the original order, and a book actually sent would not be checked as being received. Then we were apt to be asked for a credit for a book we had sent but was not properly checked in. The central office would not pay for the book or would simply ignore the invoice--the whole invoice--until they received credit. Our shipping clerk always checked the books against the invoices when packing them, and we were pretty sure the book had been received.

When unpaid invoices began to pile up, I'd check into the matter, and usually find the problem stemmed from one school. What made it especially difficult was that by the time I got around to talking to the central office about the problem, and went around to the school to check with the librarian, I'd find a new librarian who knew nothing about the situation. And we were left holding the bag.

Maguire: Did a purchasing agent ever ask for an invoice for the book wrongly checked in but not billed?

Hawkins: Oh, yes. We'd write that the book hadn't been sent, but usually didn't realize the true situation for some time. One time, though, I had proof of it. One purchasing department wouldn't pay a bill because they claimed they needed an invoice for a book sent without a bill. I couldn't find any punched IBM card for that title either in the filled or unfilled files. So I went back to the original order, but this title was uncircled--the person who made the IBM cards from the order always put a small red circle on the title after a card was made--and obviously the book had never been carded and therefore never could have been sent.

By this time, I was so fed up with the whole stupid mess, I told the billers to bill the book and forget it. The only catch was that the book the central school office said hadn't been sent was a more expensive book than the one we billed but didn't send.

Maguire: You explained also that in the retail part of Sather Gate's business, the publishers would let you have about six months to pay for the books you ordered [see p. 15].

Hawkins: Well, that was way, way back. That was back in the twenties and thirties. When they began to give credit for the return of books, then it was thirty days and you had to pay up right now. Many times when we were having all these books come in and we didn't have a big enough space, we'd have books that hadn't been checked in yet. We'd be getting dunning notices from the publishers for payment on books we hadn't even had a chance to unpack. It is still, I think, only thirty days from the date of the bill, and it's not sufficient for most bookstores.

Maguire: I was thinking that if there were a time lag between the time that you had to pay your bills and the time your customers paid their bills...

Hawkins: Yes, that's very true. That is why, in a way, the old way of doing it was good for the bookseller because he did most of his business in the Christmas season, and he sold most of his books then. So in January he usually had a lot of money, if he was going to get anywhere, and then he could send the checks in to pay for all of the books that he owed for.

Maguire: I wonder why that changed?

Hawkins: Because I guess some people misused it, and I suppose, too, that the publishers had to have more flow of cash. They couldn't wait because it got more and more expensive to publish books, and they had to have money to pay their bills. They had to pay the printer and the binder and the salaries of the people in the office, and so they couldn't afford to wait six months.

The Emeryville Warehouse

Maguire: On the subject of the Emeryville warehouse, were you with Sather Gate at the time the decision was made to buy the Emeryville warehouse and to move--

Hawkins: Well, we didn't buy it. We just leased it. I was there, but I wasn't in on it at all. That hadn't anything to do with me. The wholesale was moved first up on San Pablo Avenue. That was the first move because there simply wasn't enough room in the other place. We had that as a warehouse, and we were there I don't remember how long, several months. Then they decided that they wanted to move down to Emeryville. We had a big place there, lots of room. And it was very nice, I thought, in a lot of ways.

Maguire: What was the layout of the warehouse?

Hawkins: It was almost a block long and almost a block wide. It was very large. We had the front office, and then in the back we had the big rows of shelves. Even so, we didn't really have enough room.

Maguire: You didn't? You were filled up?

Hawkins: Oh, yes, indeed! We had over a million dollars worth of books in there. It was a large operation, but we were small in terms of the way we operated, although we had to have a big supply of books.

And of course, you never guessed right. You never knew what was going to sell the most. Then you'd order and then there was always the delay of the publishers. They took their time getting books to you. Instead of getting them in one month, you'd get them in two or three months. Sometimes they'd be out of stock at the publishers and we might wait six months. So it's not easy.

Maguire: The move to Emeryville must have been quite different from the retail store moves [see pp. 59-60].

Hawkins: It was indeed, it was indeed.

Maguire: Which staff members moved from the retail store to the Emeryville location?

Hawkins: The billers and a certain number of the office staff. And all of the shipping department moved down there, with the exception of one person who would mail books out from Sather Gate Book Shop for customers. But they had, let's see, almost forty people, I guess, working for it, maybe more.

Maguire: There were new staff members hired?

Hawkins: Oh, yes. You see, with the IBM card system, we had big tubs that had all the orders in them, and they had to be hand filed. If they could have done that by machine, it would have helped a tremendous amount. But it had to be hand filed.

There was a master card that would tell how many copies were ordered, and then all of the orders would be put behind it and a rubber band would be put around it. Each person had so many tubs to take care of. Their work was to take the order cards as they came every day and interfile them. They were supposed to check. If we had ordered twenty-five copies on the master card and the orders behind were piling up--say you've gotten fifteen copies against that--then they were supposed to let the buyers know that more of this book was needed. They were then supposed to send the card to the buyers with the number of orders against it so that the buyers would have a chance to buy intelligently. [tape interruption]

Maguire: We're discussing the Emeryville location. Did you lead tours when customers came to the warehouse?

Hawkins: Oh, yes, customers came in the warehouse. You see, there was another woman, Virginia Corwin, who also went on trips for us, and then Lois Ireland. When I found that I couldn't stay away as long as six weeks at a time (Mother needed me), I said that I would go around on day trips. I could stay overnight, but preferred day trips. Then Lois Ireland took over the distant travel, and Virginia Corwin and I sort of did much the same sort of work--she took some accounts and I took others.

Maguire: Do you think that having this warehouse, overall, made business run more smoothly?

Hawkins: Oh, yes, of course it did. There was no question about it. It was much better after that, in a sense. But it was frightfully expensive. These computers are not cheap. A theory was that you were going to have fewer people, would hire less people, and replace individual people. But we still kept one biller, that was Thelma Grant Sandon. She's great. She would bill almost as much as a computer would! [Laughs] She did the books that were bought by selection. When a customer would come in and select the books, then Grant would bill those books and not the computer. We arranged them alphabetically by author on trucks, and then they'd be billed and packed. Either the customer would take them or leave them and have them sent.

Wholesaling Difficulties

Maguire: On wholesaling, overall, do you think that there's any way that Sather Gate could have continued its wholesale business through the 1970s?

Hawkins: I don't know. The expenses were just more than the profit. There's very little profit in bookselling, actually. The margin is very small, and you have to have such a large amount of investment. Even so, even though many books could be returned, you lost money on the returns. You got some money, and in many cases they didn't give you back as much as you paid for it.

Also, you had to pay for transportation to your store, and you had to pay the transportation back. And transportation from the West Coast to the East is very expensive. Not only that, but you've lost the space; it took up space that might have been used for something that was selling. So there was a lot of loss in that sort of thing.

Maguire: Did Mr. Kahn's death affect the bookstore?

Hawkins: Well, yes, it certainly affected it. I don't know in a business way exactly how it affected it because I didn't know enough about the details. But certainly the interest of the Kahn family disintegrated upon his death, and if he had been alive he might have put in more money. I don't know. But when he died, there was no incentive whatever to continue to put money in it that wasn't already in the firm.

The Appeal of Bookselling

Maguire: Overall, would you say that you preferred work in the children's department to wholesaling?

Hawkins: Well, it was very hard to say. I don't think I ever enjoyed anything more, really, than the person to person selling of individual books. There is something there that is very, very happy and very nice. It was sort of fun in those days because you really and truly had a rapport.

But then on the other hand, there was a very good feeling with the wholesale, too, because I often helped the librarian pick books out when she came in, if I happened to be in town. I would go around with her and perhaps show her something special that I thought she or he might be interested in. There was time to help with selections when they came in.

Hawkins: Otherwise, you just filled orders and, of course, that wasn't what I was doing. I wasn't pulling orders. Occasionally, if things were very, very bad and we were very far behind, I might help by pulling some of the orders, but that wasn't the job that I really did.

Maguire: So it was the person to person contact.

Hawkins: It was the person to person contact. That's really why I liked my work at Sather Gate better than at the Press. I was dealing with figures, mostly, at the Press and not very much with individuals. I loved, I guess because I was a salesman by nature, I just loved to sell. But I could only sell something I really believed in. I couldn't sell something just to sell it, in spite of the little treasures. [Laughs] [see p. 11]

Paperback Books

Maguire: Would you discuss Sather Gate's decision to carry or not to carry paperback books when they appeared on the scene?

Hawkins: I had nothing to do with that at all.

Maguire: But they never did carry paperbacks?

Hawkins: No, we didn't carry paperbacks. Oh, I don't mean that we didn't ever have any paperbacks. We did, but we didn't have the so-called paperbacks. That is, we would have paper editions of things that were put out by Knopf, and I think we had some Vintage books and things of that sort, but we didn't have a paperback section. Well, we did have a few, but not much. There were too many.

Maguire: When did paperbacks appear on the scene in force?

Hawkins: Oh, I don't know. Of course, on the continent, they had the Tauchnitz editions a long time ago. And I think Pocket Books were among the first to come to this country. I think that was related, if I'm not mistaken, with Simon and Schuster, but I don't remember well enough. You can look it up. The information is available.*

*Simon and Schuster, together with Robert de Graff and Leon Shimkin, issued the first titles in the Pocket Book series in 1939; their efforts marked the beginning of the "paperback revolution."

Hawkins: For a long, long time, libraries didn't buy paperbacks. I was always library-minded so I was always interested in hardbacks. But I have found since that now libraries do buy paperbacks, and they consider them dispensable. I must say that I myself enjoy holding a paperback. It's easier to hang on to than is a bigger book. But since my eyes have gone bad, I can't see as well. I'm very grateful for large print books.

Other Bay Area Bookshops

Maguire: What were some other good bookstores in the Bay Area besides Sather Gate Book Shop?

Hawkins: Oh, dear. That's almost like asking me, "Where can I buy this book if you don't have it?" [Laughs] People used to come in and say to me, "Well, I've been all over San Francisco and I couldn't find it, but I knew you'd have it." I used to think to myself, "What did they go all over San Francisco for? Why didn't they come and get it from us in the first place?" [Laughs] It used to irritate me very much.

Of course, in the old days, Paul Elder's over in San Francisco and Gelbert Lilienthal were very good bookstores and, oh goodness, bookstores came and went. Those were two that had stayed a long time. But over on this side, most of the stores, when Sather Gate was alive, were not true bookstores. They were mostly either second-hand bookstores, or they were text bookstores.

The text bookstores gradually began putting in paperbacks and newer books, some of the new books. The ASUC [Associated Students of the University of California] bookstore originally didn't have anything but textbooks. But then they gradually began putting more trade books in, and then the university professors went to the ASUC bookstore because they could get a discount. They did get a discount, some of them, from Sather Gate for a while but that was discontinued after awhile.

But to ask me who were the bookstores--I never got into the other bookstores, and there was very little togetherness in the early days. Later on, the National Booksellers Association established a northern California branch and there were a lot of the book departments in the stores, like Macy's and the Emporium and other bookstores. Then there was the Bonanza Bookshop in San Francisco. But even so, there are not very many retail bookstores. Here now, there's Books Unlimited. Then, of course, in San Francisco there was Books Incorporated that Lew Langfeld ran. He has a whole chain of them now. I just don't remember the names of all of them.

Maguire: Were there any outstanding shops?

Hawkins: Sather Gate Book Shop. [Laughs] As far as I was concerned, that was the only outstanding one, certainly on this side of the bay. In Oakland there was Kahn's Book Department, and that was owned by Sather Gate, and there was Capwell's book department. But it just carried the most popular type of thing, the way most department stores do.

Decline of Sather Gate Book Shop

Maguire: When did the staff know that Sather Gate Book Shop would be closing?

Hawkins: I don't know. In 1970, the wholesale closed. Mr. Potter, I know, asked me what I thought about the situation. I was for closing it. If I had known they had that lease, I think I would have suggested that they hang on a few years longer and they wouldn't have lost quite so much money. They would have lost some, but they wouldn't, perhaps, have lost quite as much.

[end tape 1, side 2; begin tape 2, side 1]

Hawkins: The wholesale closed in December of 1970, the first of December, and Sather Gate retail stayed alive until 1972. But they were dragged down by the fact that the Emeryville warehouse was not able to be rented and we had a lease. I don't know all the ins and outs of it because I was out at that time, so I don't know. Mr. Potter was the person in charge.

Retirement

Maguire: How did you feel about leaving?

Hawkins: At that particular time my mother was not well, and Harvey Fergusson, my friend, who lived in my garden cottage was eighty-one and not very well. It seemed to me that it would be a wise idea for me to retire.

I hadn't had any idea of retiring, to tell you the truth, when I turned sixty-five, which I did in March of 1970. But in May 1970, my cleaning woman came to me and said, "I'm sorry, Miss Hawkins, but I'm going to have to leave you." I said, "Why, Hattie Mae?" She said, "Because I'm retiring! [Laughs] I'm now sixty-five." I thought to myself, "Well, if my cleaning lady can retire, I don't know what I should do," because I was very much concerned about both Harvey and Mother.

Hawkins: So I talked to my accountant who does my income tax and I said, "What do you think?"

He said, "Now, let's figure it out. What would you get if you got your social security?" I told him. Then, "What do you get?" and I told him. So then he figured awhile and he said, "Well, you'd have the same take-home pay if you retired as you would have if you worked."

I said, "What! [laughs] Do you mean that I would have just as much money to spend as I would have if I worked?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Me for retirement."

Then I worked until December when they closed the wholesale. Mr. Potter wanted me to come to the retail shop and work until Christmas, but I said that I didn't want to because it might be the last Christmas for either my mother or Mr. Fergusson (Harvey) and it's true. He died before the following Christmas. So I'm glad I did retire.

Maguire: Were you sad to leave?

Hawkins: Oh, yes, of course I was. I loved it and I had very many happy hours there. I was very distressed over the fact that they had to close the wholesale.

First Experiences in Writing Children's Books

Maguire: Now we finally get on the subject of your writing! What writing did you do?

Hawkins: The first book I wrote was Who Wants an Apple? I wrote it in 1929, and I think it was 1942 when it got published. Curiously, it was the story of--it has to do with where home is. If it had been published in 1929, it wouldn't have had the impact it had being published in 1942. Because at that time, World War II was on, and there were a great many people moving all over the country because of it and much disruption among children. Several nursery school people told me that they'd read the story to younger children. It wasn't intended for that. It was intended as an easy reading book for a child in the first or second grade. But it had reassured them that wherever their parents were was home, so that it had an impact that it wouldn't have had otherwise.

Hawkins: But it was not the first book of mine published. The first book was a book I wrote in collaboration with Victor Von Hagen called Quetzal Quest. I had, I think, thirteen books altogether published with my name on them. Every time I count it comes out different. Sometimes it comes out twelve, sometimes thirteen, sometimes it comes out fourteen. I'm never sure but we'll compromise on thirteen, [laughs] of which two books were written in collaboration with Von Hagen [the other book was Treasure of the Tortoise Islands].

For one, I did the introduction and the selection of the poems of James Stephens [A Singing Wind]. One was a selection that I did that didn't have any writing of mine in it at all [Prayers and Graces for Small Children]. I think that I wrote all the others.

Where the Ideas Come From

Maguire: Were many of these books based on incidents from your own childhood?

Hawkins: Well, yes, certainly Who Wants an Apple? was, and Don't Run, Apple was, in a way. But curiously enough, I can't even tell you now which parts were based on what was real and what was imagination. That's what happens when you write. On Don't Run, Apple, which was a sequel to Who Wants an Apple?, I describe a kitchen. It just came to me that I knew just what this kitchen looked like and I described it.

Years later, after the book was published, I was reading aloud books over KPFA radio and I was reading Understood Betsy by Dorothy Canfield Fisher. To my amazement, I realized that the kitchen in Don't Run, Apple was one that had been described in Understood Betsy. It wasn't identical, but that's where I got it. That was the kitchen that had come to my mind. So you just don't know. Until I was reading aloud this book, I hadn't the faintest notion that that was a memory from my childhood of something I had read. So when people talk about plagiarism, I don't know. It wasn't word for word, certainly, and it wasn't identical, but it was apparently what I had thought about.

Maguire: Totally unconscious.

Hawkins: Yes, totally unconscious. Then I wrote a book called Too Many Dogs. Oh, I did A Puppy For Keeps. That was probably the most popular one that I wrote of easy reading. That was based on an incident in our childhood. We did have a bitch who had puppies in a gopher hole. Queenie, as I call her in the book, was a real dog and Bob was her mate. Bob comes into Too Many Dogs.

Hawkins: We never did know how Queenie got into that gopher hole to have her pups. The gopher holes up there in Spokane were more like prairie dog towns. They weren't prairie dogs. Really, we call them gophers up in Spokane. Maybe they were prairie dogs, but they were always called gophers. We did dig her and her puppies out, and this was then the incident in Puppy For Keeps.

Then I did Don't Run, Apple and then I did Too Many Dogs. Oh, in there, I also did Prayers and Graces for Small Children, which is one that I didn't write but selected. I was going to do a book of prayers and graces that I composed, but I very shortly discovered that prayers and graces are not something you can compose. You have to find them. They're very difficult to do a good job and I wasn't good enough. But the selection was pretty good.

I got caught, though, inadvertently. I wasn't trying to do something that was copyrighted, but I asked different people if they knew any prayers that were particularly important. Ron Smith, who was our outside man at that time, told me of a prayer that his little daughter used to say. Well, it turned out that it was a Christian Science prayer, and it was copyrighted, and we almost got into a great deal of difficulty. But luckily, somebody in the office of Grosset and Dunlap was a Christian Scientist and recognized it, and they did write to the mother church and did get permission to use it.

So it was all right. But I was completely innocent. I didn't know that it was this prayer. I just thought it was a nice prayer and stuck it in. Two of the prayers that I wanted to include in that book were left out in the Grosset edition, but later on when Doubleday printed it, they put it in, one of them.

But the Too Many Dogs--and that book, in a way, is my favorite book because it's the only one that I think has a concept that I've never seen in any other child's book, which is that you might not necessarily like somebody, but you have to learn to get along with them if there they are. That was the basic idea, sort of the world situation. You may not like your next door neighbor in a country, but you've got to learn how to get along without fighting all the time. This story shows you how this fighting can develop and what you do towards curing it.

Maguire: Is it difficult to judge, in writing children's books, the kind of concepts that will be appropriate to the style of writing in that particular book?

Hawkins: In other words, what you're saying is that if it's a very simple idea, do you write it simply? Is that what you mean?

Maguire: Yes, and do you try to keep the concepts very simple?

Hawkins: Well, they seem to take their own natural course, but you don't always know what's going to come out when you start in. They're self-limiting. Sometimes if you are writing a longer book or a shorter book, you are guided by the material. I was never very original and I didn't have a lot of ideas.

Mother was one of the most creative people I've ever known, but she didn't have the self-discipline to work on these "ideas." Her ideas crowded in on her so fast that she'd halfway get through one idea and another one would come popping out. I had so few creative ideas that I had time to struggle with them until they were really viable.

I would know, because I read so much, whether the idea I had was overdone. I was more often drawn to filling a need that was open than to just write. I wrote Who Wants an Apple? because there was no easy reading book for small children except textbooks. I wanted to write a story that would be easy for them to read and was a story, not a picture book.

Maguire: So this was one of the very first easy reading books?

Hawkins: Yes, it was. I think probably the first easy reading book. It was quite a long time ago. See, it was published in '42. I wrote it in '29, and it took me until '42 to get it published. Dr. Seuss books, which were the big push toward easy reading, didn't come until the fifties. I don't remember exactly what year, '52 or '54, something along there.

Then, of course, everybody jumped on the bandwagon, but before then I couldn't persuade any publishers that there was a need for it. I must say that its time came later when everybody jumped on it. You see, Seuss was an illustrator as well, and he had a lovely sense of humor and was able to capitalize on that. But mine did fairly well. A Puppy for Keeps did quite well. I'm sorry that they're out of print because I think children still do like them.

But then Too Many Dogs came out during World War II. It came out in '44 and unfortunately, because of the lack of paper, it was cramped, the book itself. It should have had larger type, and it should have been a fatter book so that it would appeal to the age child it was intended for, which is around the fourth grade. Because of the paper shortage, it did not get republished the way it would have if it had been a different period.

How the Ideas Become Stories

Hawkins: Then I did a book called Mark, Mark, Shut the Door and I had lots of fun with that book. Unfortunately, when I started to write it, I had thought it was a good idea, but I could not make the story come out. I tried. It was going to be a sequel to A Puppy For Keeps. I wrote and I wrote, four different times I started that book, and I couldn't get anywhere with it.

One day I started to tell it to some children, and they were bored as the devil and I was too. I was just as bored as I could be, and I thought to myself, "Now, why is that boring?" It was because I solved each incident right away. I didn't build any suspense.

So I was thinking about it, and suddenly I decided I wasn't going to call the boy in the story David anymore. I'd call him Mark. Curiously enough, you see, it wasn't David that I was writing about; it was another child. It wasn't the same character. It wasn't the same person. The minute I changed his name to Mark, the story began to come and I was able--I remember I did it on a Washington's birthday. I went down to Carmel and spent the weekend down there, and I wrote it in seven hours, the whole story. It just came, whoosh! It just flew out, and I had taken a whole year trying to build that story into a story.

Maguire: You were thinking of your brother Mark then?

Hawkins: Well, no, I wasn't. I wasn't thinking consciously of anyone, but it obviously was that this Mark was not the same child that I was talking about when I was talking about David. He just wasn't the same child.

That year, before it was published but after it was accepted, I went to a summer camp--one of the Berkeley summer camps, Tuolumne Camp--and they drafted me one evening at the campfire to tell a story. I was horrified, and the only thing I could think of was Mark, Mark Shut the Door, which I had just written. So I told them this. It was a family camp and there were lots of children. I got to the point where the baby had found the mother's lipstick. I said that Mark had discovered that the baby had found mother's lipstick, at which there was a dead silence and a little voice said, "Oh, no!" and everybody in the entire audience burst into gales of laughter. Afterwards they said to me, "Who was your stooge?" [Laughs] It was really too funny for words. I never forgot it. So the story went over big! It was fairly successful. I've always been very fond of that story.

Hawkins: The "Mark, Mark, shut the door, what do you think a door is for?" is based on a naughty story that was told about Mr. J.P. Morgan. It seems that a young man had been hauled up for being indiscreet and he said to Mr. Morgan, "Well, we only do openly what you do behind closed doors."

And Mr. Morgan said, "What do you think a door is for?" That little phrase, "What do you think a door is for?," stuck with me, and so an innocent child's book comes out of it. [Laughs]

Then what happened? I'm trying to think what I wrote. There was a long gap, almost about seven years where I didn't get anything written, and then I think the next book I wrote must have been Mountain Courage. Harvey helped me with that. He gave me the idea in the first place. Then he decided that I didn't know enough about fishing so he wrote at least a half a page on the fishing incident. In another place he wrote a couple of paragraphs about getting into a freshet in rapids, being bumped around, because he said I didn't understand. So I dedicated the book to him and gave him a quarter of the royalties. [Laughs]

The next book I did was the Aunt Sitter. I had quite a hard time with that. Oh, I forgot. I did The Best Birthday in there. I can't remember where that came, to tell you the truth. But it came before the Aunt Sitter--and so did Mountain Courage come before the Aunt Sitter. The Best Birthday and Mountain Courage came out, then the Aunt Sitter, then Androcles and the Lion, and then James Stephens's Singing Wind.

But The Best Birthday was a difficult story. I always liked that story though. My original title was Annabella and the Christmas Baby, and it was done over TV. Carol Levine did it over in San Francisco with the Junior League series that they were sponsoring. It was then still called Annabella and the Christmas Baby, and then I sold it to Doubleday and we changed the title to The Best Birthday.

Maguire: What made it difficult?

Hawkins: Well, the original idea was to write a story about a ferry boat captain who got tired of going back and forth, back and forth, and suddenly took off and went up the bay and landed on an island and had a picnic with all the people on board. And I wrote that story. It was an idea that was given to me by Lewis Reynolds, who was a friend of mine, who thought that would make a good story. I thought it made a good story too. I did quite a little bit of research about ferry boat captains and things of that sort.

Hawkins: After I got it written, I realized it was an immoral story. It was not immoral from an adult standpoint, but it would be as a child's book. Because an adult knows that no captain of a ferry boat would abrogate his responsibility to do such a thing. It's just a nice idea to play with, you see. But a child doesn't realize that this is something that would be an impossibility, that it's just an amusing idea. The immorality is that you are thereby condoning irresponsibility. I'm not hipped on the subject, but I just couldn't feel that I could do a book for children like that.

So then I had to write another story. But I wanted to use the ferry boat, so I decided we'd have a ferry boat in a storm in the Bay. Then I got the idea about the Christmas baby. I wanted to do a story about the new baby for an older child. There were new baby stories about two and three year olds, but nothing for a child who was seven or eight. This was right after World War II and there was a lot of this happening--of children who were six and seven and even eight years old and their mothers were suddenly having babies. They'd been without siblings for so long it made it difficult, and they thought their parents didn't love them anymore.

So young Dick runs away. His mother has a baby on Christmas morning. He thought that she was going to have the baby on New Year's, but the baby came sooner than they expected. So he decides to go over and stay across the Bay with his grandmother. There's a storm on the bay and the ferry boat breaks down. It stops on the bay and they have to be towed back to San Francisco. This little boy becomes friends with the deck hand.

I remember I was having difficulties because the story seemed to fall into two parts--the baby story and the storm--and they didn't seem to have any pulling together. I couldn't seem to make them integrated.

I remember that Elizabeth Hamilton, who'd been my original editor at Harcourt, was visiting here and she was here for dinner one night. And I said, "This isn't the story for you because I'm doing it for this other publisher, but I'm very puzzled about this. I don't know what the deck hand has to do with it and the storm. What does it have to do with the story?"

She said, "Oh, that's very simple. Dick wouldn't have ever talked to the deck hand about how he loved his guinea pig Annabella, if there hadn't been a storm, and if the deck hand hadn't gotten him to help quell the anxieties of the passengers with his guinea pig that he loved." He wanted another guinea pig for Christmas, he didn't want a baby. In the story the deck hand says, "Well, I suppose you won't like your Annabella anymore when you get a new guinea pig."

Hawkins: The boy said, "Of course, I will. That's the reason I want a new guinea pig, so that she'll have somebody to play with."

The deck had said, "Oh, well, I thought as long as you felt your mother wouldn't love you when she had a new baby, that naturally you wouldn't like Annabella as well when you got a new guinea pig."

It puts it in an entirely new aspect, you see. That is why, she said, that storm was necessary. Well, it just was marvelous. It was all there, but I just didn't see it. So I was able to write the story, and it got published, and was chosen as a Junior Literary Guild selection and did quite well. In fact, it got in a collection of Best Stories for Children. It was a Doubleday collection and was published by Doubleday.

Then, of course, I did Mountain Courage which, as I told you, Harvey helped me with, and then I did the Aunt Sitter. I had a time with that because I couldn't seem to make that come together. But it did eventually, through the help of my editors. My editors were always marvelous and I always liked them. That was Vernon Ives. He was the one who bought Who Wants an Apple? in the first place, after Elizabeth Hamilton had turned it down for Harcourt. She had published the first two books, but she said they had not been successful and she was afraid to take this on.

Then the very last thing I did was Androcles and the Lion. I had wanted to do four books: Androcles and the Lion, the story of the little boy and the dike--but I found out that was an original story by Mary M. Dodge, in Hans Brinker. It's an original story; it isn't a folk tale--the little boy of Haarlem who stuck his finger in the dike. Then I wanted to do the story of Robert the Bruce and the spider. What was the fourth one? [Pause] It was another story that was very much liked in days gone by, and you don't find it anymore.

Well, Androcles was the one that was the easiest to do because it was already in story form. I just tried to make it a little more than just one paragraph. Then I was going to work on Robert the Bruce. Oh, I know, King Alfred, the story of Alfred and the cakes was the fourth story. And I did do that. I did a lot of research on that, but it's never been a satisfactory book. I don't know whether I'll ever manage it or not.

When I started work on it, I found out so much about King Alfred that was so wonderful, that I felt it was a shame that children should only know King Alfred with this story about burnt cakes, which is an apocryphal story anyway (there's no assurance that it was real) and another story about him. But I put those all in together to make a tale and it just didn't quite come off. I think it's a pretty good story myself, but I've not been able to sell it.



Quail Hawkins with
books she authored
Boys' and Girls' Room,
Sather Gate Book Shop.



Quail Hawkins
Berkeley, California
circa 1927



Quail Hawkins speaking to a class of children about writing for
boys and girls, 1969-70.

Hawkins: Robert the Bruce--I was in England and was talking to a man who wrote the life of Robert the Bruce, and it was published here by University of California Press. I was reading it but I hadn't seen anything about the spider, and I said something to him about it. He said, "It's not there because it didn't happen to Bruce."

I said, "What?"

He said, "It happened to one of his followers, one of the Douglasses, and Sir Walter Scott just changed it and dressed it up as Robert the Bruce. It's been given to him ever since, but it didn't really happen to him."

I said, "Where did it happen?"

He said, "On the coast of Antrim."

I said, "Antrim! Do you mean in Ireland?"

He said, "Yes, but it did happen."

I said, "I guess I can't use the story."

He said, "Oh, go ahead and use it. It's a good story."

But you know, I have never been able to decide whether I should do it as happening to Douglas or just continue the old story of Robert the Bruce. I couldn't quite bring myself to, knowing that it was done by Scott. The authors of Robert the Bruce's biography gave me the name of the book that would tell me about it, and I could not locate the book. I've never been able to, and I can't read his handwriting well enough to get the author's name, so I've been stymied on that.

Writing and Working

Maguire: Where on earth did you find the time and the energy to do this writing while you were working?

Hawkins: Well, in those days when I did my writing, in the first place, I didn't drink any liquor at all. If you come home and you have a drink before dinner, you relax and you're finished for work. In those days, I would come home from work, and I would sit down to the typewriter--and my mother was also young and vigorous--and I would write from the minute I got in the house until dinner time. Then I would come and eat dinner and get right up from the table and go write for two more hours.

Hawkins: If I could write three hours a night, four nights a week, I could get a book done in short order. But if I stopped to do anything, I couldn't. I would work until about ten o'clock, and then all of a sudden--I always knew when it was finished because a shutter would come down over my mind--just like a shutter, like a curtain, right in the middle of a sentence--and I knew that there was no use in my going on.

[end tape 2, side 1; end of Interview IV]

CHAPTER V

[Interview: March 13, 1978]
[begin tape 1, side 1]

Speaking Engagements

Maguire: I thought you might like to discuss your address to the International Reading Association.

Hawkins: I was asked by the committee to make a speech as the author; the subject was children, books, and reading. This was their international meeting to be held in conjunction with the American Library Association meeting. They had it ahead of time, the day before the American Library Association meeting began.

Of course, I was very excited. I thought there would be a large group and I was most thrilled to be asked. Actually, there were only about ninety people which was not an enormous audience, particularly for the number of people who were involved, and I was one of the less distinguished members. May Arbuthnot was one and she spoke from the point of view of a specialist.*

Then I spoke. The title of my speech was "Bright is the Ring of Words," which was taken from a poem of Robert Louis Stevenson which I had a terribly hard time finding. I wanted a good little

*May Hill Arbuthnot (1884-1969) was a teacher, writer of children's books, and associate professor of education at Western Reserve. Among the awards she has received for her books is the Regina Medal of the Catholic Library Association.

Hawkins: poem and I found what I think is fine. "Bright is the ring of words/
When the right man rings them,/ Fair the fall of songs/ When the singer
sings them./ Still they are caroled and said--/ On wings they are
carried--/ After the singer is dead/ And the maker buried." [See
The Complete Poems of Robert Louis Stevenson (New York: Charles Scribner
Sons), 1923.] That's the way I felt about writing for children.

So this talk, which I had to write and read--This is not my style
at all. My way of giving speeches is to do it spontaneously. I have
a fair idea of what I'm about to say, or what I want to say, and then
I prepare it mentally and maybe have a few notes. But I rarely write
a speech. I find that it's very hard for me to really know what I'm
going to say ahead of time because so much depends on your audience
and the response of your audience. If my audience is not responding,
I change my talk.

I remember one time, I was being asked to talk for a school group.
This woman was paying me, which is unheard of, practically. Most of
them didn't bother.

Maguire: They didn't?

Hawkins: Oh, no. They always ask you to do it for free. I was very delighted.
On the way out to give the talk she asked me what I was going to talk
about. So I told her and she said, "Fine, fine, that's just exactly
what I want."

I got there and made my speech. And about half way through I
saw her looking at me in the most puzzled way, and I suddenly realized,
right in the middle of things, that I hadn't said a single solitary
thing I had told her I was going to talk about. I simply went from
where I left off talking to her and went on, so I backtracked fairly
quickly and pulled in a few of the things that I had told her I was
going to talk about. [Laughs]

After the talk there were questions and discussion and I enjoyed
it very much. It was later published--which is more than most of my
talks were [laughs]--in the Perspectives in Reading series, number
three, prepared by a committee of the International Reading Association.

Maguire: Did you actually change the speech once you actually got up and gave
it?

Hawkins: No, I read it, but the discussion was, of course, ad lib. I loved to
talk. I read an article in Vogue when I was a little girl, and it
said that to be smart one should take what is a fault (this was refer-
ring to your physical make up) and play it up instead of trying to
play it down. If you had a big nose, make the most of it, you see.
If you had some other defect, exaggerate it and make it into a personal
asset. My great besetting sin was talking too much, and it was really

Hawkins: kind of amusing that my life should include so much lecturing. The thing that always amazed me was that very often, people who heard me asked me to come and speak again and, of course, they must have liked what I said.

One of the very first talks that I ever gave was to my brother's seventh grade class when I went home on a vacation, one of the first vacations I took home after I started work at Sather Gate Book Shop. He said that he had told his teacher that I knew all about children's books and that she wanted me to come and talk to the children about it. So I hastily gathered up all the nice children's books we had around the house that I could find. They brought in other classes, two other classes, and it was fun. I enjoyed talking with the children and getting their responses.

Then later on, while I was still quite new at this, I was asked to speak at Santa Rosa High School. Some people in Sebastopol got wind of the fact that I was coming up and asked me if I would speak in the afternoon (I was to speak in the morning at an assembly at Santa Rosa High School).

I had never been in Santa Rosa. I guess that must have been in 1927, '26 or '27. It was when I was still very young. I didn't have a car so I had to go up by bus. I was still very new in California and I didn't know how big Santa Rosa was. I thought that it was a small town. When I got there, there was an assembly waiting for me because my bus got in a little late. All I had with me were some book jackets. I didn't have any books; I couldn't carry them. I was escorted up to a bare stage, nothing on it at all, and I was terrified.

I was talking to the girl's assembly and there were seven hundred girls. I remember in my own days in high school, which were not very far behind me, how we always felt very haughty about speakers that took our time at an assembly, and I realized that this was probably going to be a difficult thing. So I took the jackets out--I was given a little table so I could hide my trembling legs, I said--and put the jackets on the table and started talking. When I got my first laugh, then I felt better, and from then on I was able to talk without any trouble.

After the talk, I was escorted to Sebastopol. I was taken by one of the teachers and I had lunch. This was a smaller group; there were only a hundred in this group. I couldn't understand when I started home why I was so completely exhausted. [Laughs] I don't think I've ever been more tired than I was after those two talks.

Hawkins: But I did learn to have my audience with me and I talked very informally. I didn't give a set speech. I have found that more people will listen to you if you talk informally. But I did try to have it fairly well organized, and I did try to have something definite to say.

I also discovered over the years that people prefer specifics rather than generalities. You can start talking about principles, and then you find out that what they really want is something specific. I would try to talk about the important things in back of children's books, especially if I were talking to a school group. I don't mean children; I mean adults. They would sit there with their notebooks and pencils poised. I would be talking about the great principles in back of books for children--and look restless and bored. The minute I held up a book to illustrate a point, out came the pencils busily writing down.

This always annoyed me because the illustration was only--I could have given them a thousand different illustrations. This was just one that I had. I don't think they had the faintest notion of what I was trying to say. But I learned that it was better to set your principles right in the middle of your examples. Then they might write it down. [Laughs]

Maguire: So you would go with sort of a general outline in your head.

Hawkins: Yes, yes. But if I found that my audience was different from what I'd anticipated, were more alert than I had realized, I would give them a little more difficult talk. And if they were tired, if it were after dinner for instance, I didn't try to be too specific about serious things. Always if there were two or three speakers, I preferred to be last because by that time the audience was really tired, and if you gave them a somewhat light approach, they were always grateful to you.

I remember once, I was giving a talk in Folsom, I think. Anyway, as it was an evening talk I assumed I would be talking to adults, not children, but when I got there I found the audience had a considerable number of children--several of whom came round me asking questions before the talk. I told them I'd answer their questions during the talk. When I started, I told the audience that when I had a mixed audience of both children and grown ups I talked to the children, and maybe some of the grown ups might get something out of it. After the talk, one of the youngsters, about ten years old said to me quite solemnly, "I think the grown-ups got something out of your talk." I was delighted. [Laughs]

Contribution to the Encyclopaedia Britannica

Maguire: When did you write your article on children's literature for the Encyclopaedia Britannica?

Hawkins: I wrote that under very bad circumstances, and I'm not at all proud of that article. In fact, I think it's a very poor article. I wish I could be proud of it, but I'm not. In the first place, I don't know whatever possessed me to accept the assignment. They pay so poorly, two cents a word. And they wanted an 8,500 word article combining English and American children's books and putting in magazines as well. I was a darn fool to even think I could handle it.

At the time, although I didn't know it, I was quite ill. I had very high blood pressure. I had been working on this article for some time. I'd been in bed with the flu, and at the end of that time, my blood pressure was 236 over 110 and I was feeling very, very low.

Maguire: But it is an honor though.

Hawkins: Well, people think so. But you know that little sign that says, "Think Ahead," where it starts out with large letters and then it comes down at the end? Well...I was very anxious for the Britannica to use an earlier article on children's books. I was trying to think of the author's name. He was very distinguished. I think his name was Harvey Darton. He had done a wonderful book on children's literature [See Frederick J. Harvey Darton, Children's Books in England; Five Centuries of Social Life (Cambridge, England: University Press), 1932], and he had done an article for the Britannica. Then there was another good article that I came across. I'd liked to have had them leave the Darton article in for the history of children's literature. Then I could have brought them up to date on the things from the twenties on. It would have been a far better thing.

But as it was, I had to go back and practically rewrite Darton--which was much better done than anything I could do--and bring in the children's books from the United States, which had always before been separate. It had American children's books and English children's books, and then you had to go back and forth between the American and English. It was a very poor idea on their part, I think, and I did the best I could with it, but they limited me.

Hawkins: In order just to mention some of these things--I had over 11,000 words. The end of it was where I was really expert and knew all about those books, but I could hardly mention any of them that were important because the space had been taken up by the early history, which was important. So I went down to Laguna Beach to be with a cousin of mine who was recuperating from an operation. I was very sick with this high blood pressure, which I didn't know how to cope with exactly, and I had a heart beat that I was conscious of all the time. I worked on the article because they kept writing me to hurry up. This was in January, 1961, I think it was. I was miserable.

I finished it up really ill and very unhappy with it. It was not a very good article and I sent it off to them. And for this pittance of two hundred dollars, they wanted me to also provide them with illustrations and comments on the illustrations. I said, "You've got all the names of these people, and you can find the illustrations in the books in the library if you want to get them." So the article came out without any illustrations.

Maguire: This was the 1963 edition?

Hawkins: Yes. After their hurrying me, it took them until 1963 to get the article published. I never was happy about it. I don't consider it one of my better pieces of work. It may be an honor, but I at least have some integrity and I know when something's good and when it isn't, and it was not very good. I still think they'd be very smart if they went back and got the Harvey Darton article out of the earlier edition and used that for the early history, and then have a separate article on later books for boys and girls. Of course, now so many more have come out, it would have to be a longer article.

I had a good deal of help in writing the article from Louise Seaman Bechtel [see p. 17,18], whom I wrote to when I was going to do it. I told her, "I'm afraid I cribbed from your letter." [Laughs] I suppose it is an honor to have been asked. However, I feel an author is worthy of his hire, and they should pay better.

Maguire: I would think you would have had a little bit more say in the article.

Hawkins: Well, I was so fed up with the whole thing, I just sort of threw it at them. I was feeling bad and I didn't enjoy--I suppose I should say I was feeling badly. [Laughs]

Trends in Children's Book Publishing

Maguire: You've been in a great position to witness many changes in the writing of books that have occurred over the years. I was wondering if you could comment on books in the thirties as compared to books in the forties.

Hawkins: Well, I guess I'm just an old fogey, but I truly think that some of the books that were written during the thirties--and after it was possible to reproduce good color work reasonably--some of the books in those days were really superb. And the forties and fifties. I'm not quite so enthusiastic about books today for children.

Of course, I'm one of the people who feels that when a child reaches a certain age, he or she should be reading adult books, the great literature of the world. When they want to read books of real life, they shouldn't be reading children's books. They should be reading adult books. When I say "real life," I mean some of the more sordid aspects of existence--read Madame Bovary and some of the great modern novels too. I'm not entirely happy with the so-called junior novel.

Maguire: This is for adolescents?

Hawkins: Adolescents. But I'm really out of it now. I find that I'm not fully in sympathy with the more outspoken books on drugs and sexual aberrations and things of that sort that are aimed at children. I think that children should read about things of that sort, but they should read adult books when they're able to read adult books and have some judgment. Too often, the books that are done for children of that nature are contrived. Now, this isn't true of all of them. There are many that are good.

I do think that books for boys and girls go in waves of popularity. There will be a time when all the books must be about blacks or ethnic groups of one kind or another. Then, I suppose, at one time all the books had to be about Latin America. Now, the Chicano is being widely spoken about.

I don't think that there's anything wrong in recognizing that there's a need for that kind of book. If you are able to write it from your heart, and you really and truly can add something to the books that are already available in a subject, then I think it's okay. But just to write a formula book that is written because this is the popular thing, this I don't particularly care for. And I do think that a certain amount of this is done.

Hawkins: For a while, when the ESEA Title II money was very available [see footnote, p. 88], all sorts of publishers jumped into the field of children's books because they were making money on them, and not all of the editors that were hired were really equipped. There are, of course, many excellent editors for boys' and girls' books today, and there are very fine books being brought out.

But I don't react to them quite as I did to some of the earlier ones, and I am sure it's my age, partly. After all, when you reach my age, and I will be seventy-three this month, you find you haven't got time to read everything, so I haven't had time to read a lot of the children's books since I retired. I call it "graduated." [Laughs] So I can't really speak about the books in the last seven years. There are so many publishers that I've never heard of in Publishers' Weekly these days. There have been so many conglomerates that have bought up the big publishers, and it's just a completely different field. It isn't at all as it was.

There was an intimacy about publishing in the thirties that there's not now. In some cases, I think there was a little more maturity. I notice an awful lot of very young people go into editing and sometimes their spelling is not too good. It's amazing how many errors you find in either spelling or sentence structure--things that should be copy edited out. There's no excuse for bad spelling, unless the person is trying to reproduce something and there's a meaning for it.

Maguire: Especially in children's books.

Hawkins: Especially in children's books. It's the same thing that's true with TV--the slovenly language. The children have no real criteria to judge by.

Language and Literacy

Hawkins: After all, literacy, real literacy, began about the time of the Reformation when the Bible was translated, and people were supposed to read the Bible and judge for themselves (the Protestants). The King James version of the Bible was a piece of terrific literature. It was beautiful. And it was a common denominator for all classes. Everybody, including the poorest people, read the Bible, and they couldn't help being affected by the language of the Bible. Even the most ordinary person, in those days, read the Bible. Of course, nowadays very few do, I suppose, unless they read it as literature.

Hawkins: But there was a common denominator there that everyone knew, and it was beautiful. Its language was great. And they knew what it meant, too, because at the time it was written it was the beautiful language, the English language, as it was spoken in those days and people, even the ones who were ignorant in their own speech, were aware of good speech that gave them some criteria. Today we have no models. We really have none.

Maguire: Television certainly isn't one.

Hawkins: Television doesn't offer it. And if the authors are writing only in the vernacular of the least advantaged people, where do we go from there? I always have the feeling that democracy, and all that it stood for, was to give people who didn't have an opportunity to have an opportunity to raise their standards to something that was more beautiful and more wonderful. I think that there should be an exchange between the so-called middle class--and I'm not talking now in a derogatory sense of the middle class, any more than I'm talking in a derogatory sense about those who were not middle class. But I see no excuse for denigrating what might be valuable. I don't think that most of the middle class has high enough standards.

Elements of a Good Children's Book

Maguire: This is probably oversimplifying the matter, but can you say, briefly, what makes a good children's book?

Hawkins: There are many things that go into making it. In the first place, I think that for a book to be a really good book for anybody, and this applies to children too, there must be a genuine emotion involved. There must be character development of some kind and, of course, for children there should be a story. I never have been completely sold on these "mood" picture books which don't do anything except sort of move around a little bit and maybe have beautiful pictures, but they don't have any real story. I think that a story should enlarge a child's horizon in some way, should make him more aware of emotion, of the world around him, of other people, so that he can meet people of all kinds and have some understanding of what goes into their lives.

In this sense, I think that books with ethnic backgrounds are extremely valuable if they are written by someone in that particular ethnic group, who can write about it from inside out, not from outside in. Those are very valuable and help a child to grow.

Hawkins: After all, what we read as children--and see of TV--does condition us to what life is as far as we're concerned. I was thinking the other day about the fact that I loved The Wind in Willows so much when I was a child, but I had lived out in the woods or the vacant lots when I was five years old. My father had bought this property, and we put up tents and we lived there. And I had a very vivid feeling for spring. I'd experienced it and I knew how Mole felt. I tried to read it to my niece, who grew up in San Francisco, and it meant nothing to her at all. She had never experienced any spring so that it didn't increase her understanding of spring. But there might have been another book that would have done that for her that I didn't find.

But I mean, different books speak to different people. You can't consider that this book is going to be for everybody. I also think there are children who simply don't read because they're just not readers. [Laughs] There are some people who don't like to play football and there are some that do. But nobody ever feels that because you don't play basketball or football, if you are a child, that you are obviously out of it. I think that same thing is true as far as reading is concerned.

Berkeley in the 1920s and '30s

Maguire: I wanted to ask you about the city of Berkeley itself and Telegraph Avenue, and what kind of changes you've seen.

Hawkins: [Laughs] Oh, the changes are so great I can't even begin! In the first place, when I first came to Berkeley, it was a college town, primarily. The professors who taught were many of the people who lived here. Berkeley was a bedroom community.

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

Many people commuted to San Francisco to work, but there were also many professors who lived here. The shops were mostly individually owned. There weren't many chain stores. Hink's [department store] was Hink's. Sather Gate Book Shop was Sather Gate Book Shop. There were individually owned places and it had the atmosphere of a small town. There weren't one-way streets. There wasn't a tremendous amount of traffic. There were no residence halls at the time that I came. People who went to school here lived in houses and boarding houses and cottages. There were lots of backyard cottages.

Hawkins: I remember that Lenore Glen, who later became Lenore Glen Offord who writes "The Gory Road,"* and two friends of hers lived in a little house, and their bathtub was a washing tub, one of these concrete tubs before the modern washing machines were prevalent. We had a great time. It was lots of fun.

I think I mentioned my house was fourteen feet long and seven feet wide and had no running water. The bathroom on the back porch of the house in front was my bathroom, and outside my front door was a hose bib. I paid ten dollars a month for this. It was furnished. I had a little single bed and a little table, and I had a little toaster and a little electric hot plate I could put a pan on to boil water.

It was fun. We had lots of fun, everybody. There were loads of people who lived that way. I believe the first dormitory was build by then. It was the residence hall for men. It didn't, of course, accomodate any great number of people.

The ferries were in existence then, no bridge to San Francisco. I remember wondering if they ever would have one. The ferries were a great thrill to me. I always enjoyed the ferry ride. On Shattuck Avenue there were two trains. One was the Key Route and the other was the Southern Pacific. The Southern Pacific had red cars, and there were orange cars for the Key Route. You'd go to the mole for the Southern Pacific. They had great big white paddle wheel steamers and they had a restaurant.

I remember that I took dancing lessons in San Francisco. In those days, we worked six days a week, and we worked from nine until six. In order to get over to San Francisco by seven o'clock when the dancing lesson occurred, you just got right on the train and went to San Francisco. So you ate on the ferry. You gobbled--I believe it was on the Key Route that they had this wonderful corn beef hash that everybody loved. But you could have a meal. It wasn't very much of a meal because everybody was hurrying. You were on the ferry boat itself about twenty minutes, I guess. Then you streamed off. And they had also car ferries that took the automobiles across.

*In "The Gory Road," a weekly feature of the San Francisco Chronicle's "This World" section, Ms. Offord reviews recently published detective stories.

Hawkins: You dressed rather primly. You never went to San Francisco without a hat. I remember one time not expecting to go to San Francisco in the evening, and I didn't have a hat on and I couldn't go home (I didn't have time to go home). I went out to the Sather Gate Apparel and bought a hat because I wouldn't possibly allow myself to go to San Francisco without a hat and gloves.

Things were fun in San Francisco too. You could get a very good dinner for fifty cents. We had a number of little restaurants that we went to. There was La Favorite, and then there was Il Trocadero and Lucca's and Ripley's White House and a number of others. I can't remember all of them now. But you would go there and have a nice dinner for fifty cents. In some places, they served you wine in tea-cups because it was Prohibition, and in the Italian quarter this was quite a common thing.

There was a camaraderie there that was very nice. There was no Opera House when I first came. That came later in the thirties. You went to concerts at the auditorium. It was certainly big and bleak, but eventually we did get the Opera House. I remember how elegant it looked to us with the great gold curtain and the white and gold walls. It was a big thrill.

The building of the bridges was a very exciting time, too, and to ride over the bridges after they were built. We had good train service. We actually had much better service to San Francisco than we have now because we had two ferry groups. The Key Route went over what is now called the Berkeley Pier, and it went out quite a distance and then would go over to the ferry building. The other one went from Oakland Mole, where the SP trains also were, and you went over on that way. We went everywhere on streetcars or buses. I think it was streetcars for the most part.

I remember going out to Mills College (that's a long way away) for concerts on Sundays or in the evening, and I didn't think anything about it. The concerts were wonderful concerts for fifty cents. The Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge concerts were wonderful. There was, of course, no theater at Cal. Wheeler Hall was the only place they could put plays on. I never could understand why it took so long for them to get a theater, but it did. Sather Gate Apparel was there in those days. It was a small shop and very nice. And you knew everybody. People knew each other.

I always walked to work. I lived on the south side of the campus for a while, and then later I lived on Arch Street, in back of the home of Mrs. Laura Adams Armer and her husband [Sidney Armer]. They were very nice, sweet people. She wrote a book on the Navajos that won the Newbery Medal, Waterless Mountain. She was really a very fine woman and they looked after me. I lived in a garden cottage in their backyard, and that was lots of fun too.

Hawkins: Everyone seemed to live in somebody's attic or a room in somebody's house. The university students were everywhere. They didn't share apartments the way they do now. There weren't very many apartments, as a matter of fact. They were just mostly homes. Now, south of the campus you see apartment after apartment, after apartment. When I came to California those were all homes, and almost every one of them had a least one student in it, sometimes more.

I remember one place that Eloise Evans, a friend of mine, lived in. We would go into this house, and I think it must have been one of the Maybeck* houses. Its interior was in redwood. We walked up some stairs to the third floor, and that was the attic and she had the whole attic. There was a little balcony and right over the balcony was a big fig tree, and during the season for figs, we could go out and pick figs. She would invite me over for dinner and we would talk.

She was putting herself through school and she was earning her own living. She was going to school and working at the same time. She put herself through. In those days it cost twenty-five dollars a semester, and you took about fifteen units a semester. About fourteen or fifteen units was the usual amount, and that was a pretty good schedule. You had quite a few classes. She was very capable.

She was the youngest of seven children, and I was the oldest of seven children. We had a mutual admiration for each other's cooking, so we used to cook together quite a bit. I was living in this little place where I couldn't cook, so I'd go over to her house a couple of nights a week and bring groceries. We always cooked together very well because she'd cook certain dishes and I'd cook certain dishes, and then we'd gather together and sit at the table and sit there and admire each other for our good food. [Laughs]

Oh, I must mention The Black Sheep restaurant. It was very popular with the professors and all who liked good food. Eloise and I both used to eat there, and I remember my favorite dish was smoked beef tongue with fresh spinach--the entree cost thirty-five cents. And it was delicious. Fritzi Zuckerman and Lilian--I'm not sure of her last name but I think it was Henderson--owned it. Fritzi did the cooking and Lilian handled the business end. Fritzi was a marvelous cook.

*Bernard R. Maybeck (1862-1957), a well-known Berkeley architect, was a major exponent of regional Bay Area style.

Hawkins: The first restaurant was an old house with many rooms, a little bit like Chez Panisse--but with a large open deck at one side with a great big, round table on it. I noticed that people seemed to sit there in ones and twos, so one day, when I was alone and the place was full, I sat there. The woman sitting next to me asked, "When did you join the Psychology Department at the University?" I discovered that table was occupied by members of the Psychology Department.

Later, the Black Sheep built a brick building on the site and when the University tore all the buildings down there--it was in the same block with Sather Gate Book Shop--they had to move as we did, only they built on Bancroft Way. By this time, Fritzi no longer did all the cooking, but whenever a new dish appeared on the menu I always ordered it, because Fritzi always cooked the new items until she had standardized it for her chefs.

Like many good things, after Fritzi retired, the place died shortly after, although it had been bought by another restaurant.

The waitresses were students, and I remember one saying to me, "Be sure to go to the Alpha Mu concert at Stephens Union tonight--they are playing the Brahms Quintet in F Minor for Piano and Strings." I did and was so enthralled I bought the phonograph records for my record library--the first set of records I ever bought.

As I said before, the professors dropped in to Sather Gate to read the books and to buy books. They had a ten percent discount so they bought from us a lot. It was no great deal to talk to a professor. You got to know them and enjoy them, and they would talk books with you. I thought it was a very stimulating time. I look back on it with considerable pleasure.

We had rather simple good times in those days. We didn't worry about drugs, I don't think. There was a certain amount of drinking, but a lot of people didn't drink. I didn't drink because I'd grown up in a dry state, and I was afraid to serve liquor because I didn't want to lose my eyesight. I remember one young man came to one of our parties and said as he left, it was the first time he had gone to a party where they didn't serve liquor and he'd had a good time.

But we had a lot of fun. Sometimes somebody would have a relative who had a sailboat and would arrange for us to go sailing together, and that would be fun. Or we went on picnics out near Stinson Beach over in Marin County, or up around the Berkeley hills.

I remember one time climbing up behind the Campanile and up the hill during the spring to do some studying. It was a lovely spring day and I was sitting there reading, and I happened to look up and I was completely surrounded by cows! [Laughs] They were just looking

Hawkins: at me so puzzled, and I was just completely absorbed. I didn't notice them coming at all! But it was very rural here, it really was.

Of course, up along Grizzly Peak, which didn't have a lot of houses in that time, there were parking places, and a certain amount of necking went on then as now, but certainly sexuality was not as open as it is now by any means. I don't imagine there was much less going on perhaps, but it certainly was not overt. It was definitely covert.

Berkeley in the 1940s

Maguire: What about the forties? Had things changed much?

Hawkins: Of course, the forties was the war and everything was attuned to the war effort. Food was a problem, of course, but in one way it wasn't. The things that you had never seen appeared. They had rations for butter and meat and, of course, for shoes and things like that. Particularly sugar, meat and butter, I remember, were rationed and you just had a certain amount. But there were certain meats that weren't rationed. So you were able to buy meat, but you didn't always get the most popular types of meat.

I remember that we would get a brisket of beef, which was not rationed, have it tied like a roast, and roast it. It was delicious. Nowadays, you can hardly afford to buy a brisket! [Laughs] But in those days it was reasonable. You could get duck liver. Duck liver was absolutely heavenly. It was seventy-five cents a pound and not rationed, and a half a pound would easily take care of four people. You put in noodles and cream sauce. Very good indeed.

We had all kinds of reasonable foods. Food was not by any means as expensive. Before the war, of course, it was cheaper and I used to consider that ten cents per serving for meat was all I could afford. If I bought a roast for forty cents, it had to feed four people. Of course, you couldn't get a chop for forty cents now! [Laughs] But you could get lamb chops for ten cents apiece. They were thin, it's true.

I can remember when I went to New York in 1929, being absolutely shocked that hamburger was forty-five cents a pound. I had never seen hamburger at that price. It was always twenty-five cents a pound. Butter was twenty-five cents and thirty-five cents a pound, things like that. The prices were very, very cheap. It cost you twenty-one cents to go to San Francisco and another twenty-one cents to come back.

Maguire: This was before the war or during it?

Hawkins: This was before the war and during the war too. Of course, you had buses then. I understand that GM [General Motors] bought all the electric trains and took the tracks out and put on the buses--to our detriment. If they had left the electric trains, we wouldn't be in this mess we're in as far as pollution is concerned.

Berkeley in the 1950s

Maguire: Were the fifties as apathetic as I've heard they were?

Hawkins: The fifties were good as far as I was concerned. I didn't feel that they were apathetic. I wasn't in college then, of course, and I don't think that the professors were apathetic. Actually, the early fifties were far from apathetic. The people who were going to college in the late forties were people who had just come back from war. They were very serious students and took a serious interest in their futures. They worked hard and they made the younger people work harder because they were more serious. But, of course, when you got into the fifties, then there was a letdown. And there was a considerable amount of prosperity. The five-day week had come in. I think that came in in the forties, if I remember rightly.

I don't know. I don't remember the fifties as a separate decade, not having been in school, as being anything particularly apathetic. Of course, they were interested in trivialities--some. The sororities and fraternities would have panty raids and things like that, but that was just your young people having fun. I suppose that it was mildly innocuous. It certainly wasn't as violent as the later sixties became.

Maguire: What was Telegraph Avenue like in the fifties?

Hawkins: It was just like another street. It certainly didn't have the street people. I laugh though. People are so horrified about the street people, and they're always making snide remarks. And I think to myself, these same people go to South America or to Europe or Morocco or something and talk about the wonderful things that they got on the street, all the wonderful things they were able to buy. It's picturesque if it's in another country, and if it's in your country, oh, terrible! "Look at these dreadful people," and so forth! It's ridiculous. There's nothing wrong with street people except, unfortunately, some of the materials are stolen.

Maguire: When did they appear on the Avenue?

Hawkins: They appeared in the late sixties and in the seventies, and they're still with us.

Maguire: So they weren't there in the early sixties, during the Free Speech Movement.

Hawkins: Not in the very early sixties. No, they came in in the middle sixties, I'd say.

Then, of course, they remade Telegraph Avenue. The street itself was changed quite a bit. They made broader sidewalks and narrowed the street considerably and made it one-way. It used to be two-way. Bancroft Way was two-way. Durant was two-way. That all changed about the end of World War II to one-way streets. We didn't have one-way streets before World War II.

The Free Speech Movement

Maguire: What are your recollections of the Free Speech Movement?

Hawkins: Well, it seemed to me, being an older person and not directly concerned, that it was much ado about nothing. I thought that if the University hadn't reacted and just let things alone, it wouldn't have blown up, but I may be wrong.

There was unrest in all the universities all over the world. Before it came here, it was very much evident in France and in England. Certainly the long hair came from England because I remember very well when it started there and the articles about the long-haired men--what did girls think of it and that sort of thing. But I thought, what difference does it make? My goodness, men's style of hair has gone back and forth over the centuries.

If you take the time of Tom Jones--I don't mean the singer, Tom Jones!--men wore their hair long or they wore wigs. Short hair didn't come in really until the Industrial Revolution when your hair might get caught in machinery, just as the rather dull clothing came in during the Industrial Revolution. It had to be practical and not show dirt. Before that, men's clothes were very bright and gay. They wore much more brilliant clothing almost than women did. It certainly was never considered unmanly to be dressed up very fancy.

Hawkins: So I can't get too excited about these things. I don't like to have people speak in the so-called Free Speech language in my presence. I was brought up where you didn't feel that a man or a woman had to speak to you in the terms that you hear being used in today's conversation. That was considered--well, if men wanted to talk that way when they were alone, they did, but they didn't talk that way in front of women.

It still shocks me today to hear women using words like "shit" and things of that sort in common conversation. It shows a lack of imagination, it seems to me, that every other word should be a bodily--[laughs] I just don't happen to care for it. I think there are other ways. In fact, I remember when I was young my mother overheard my brothers cursing and she said, "Well, that's man talk, but you don't talk about it with us. If someone really makes you mad and you want some high sounding words, all right, you can just call someone a "son of a laughing Malaga jackass." Of course, a laughing Malaga jackass was a bird [the kookaburra] but--[laughs]. So one of my brothers tried that and he said the boy fought him!

So it offends my ear when I hear that language used commonly. It truly does. It's just my bringing up, I realize, but I think there are other words in the language that you can used to express yourself. I think it's a paucity of language to some extent to use these terms.

Maguire: Do you remember any particular Telegraph Avenue characters that used to come into the shop?

Hawkins: I told you about Mrs. Pink Ink [see p.13], but I don't remember any particular characters. There were lots of characters that came in the Sather Gate Book Shop. I remember one whose name I shan't mention. She wore a long cape and she carried a walking stick. She always wore rather masculine dress, and she'd come in (she was an older woman) and she'd point her stick at someone and she'd say, "I'll have you!" You felt as if you were going to be eaten up for dinner. [Laughs] And you waited on her.

Then, of course, there was one very nice old lady who taught English to foreign students. She always gave her students a present and she wasn't very rich. We had ten-cent books then, and she'd come in and get twenty ten-cent books and ask us to wrap them for gifts. So we'd have to wrap twenty individual books for ten cents apiece. But those people were nice. I didn't feel bad about that.

There was one customer who never could make up her mind. She was a nice woman but she never could decide what she wanted, and it was impossible to wait on her. You never could make a sale because she couldn't decide what she wanted. So the first person who saw her would just vanish into the storeroom, and the second person who saw her would just vanish, and the one who was left was the one who had to wait on her. [Laughs]

Hawkins: There were different types of people, but mostly they were interesting. I felt that being in the business I was in was very special, and most of the people loved books. It was always sad, though, when people that loved the books so much couldn't afford them and would buy too many books at Christmas time, and then would have to spend the rest of the year trying to pay for them. They would be on what we called the "don't charge list," and you weren't able to charge any books to them.

Disruptions of the Late 1960s

Maguire: Did the violence of the late 1960s affect the Sather Gate Book Shop?

Hawkins: To some extent, but at that time I was working down in Emeryville and I missed it entirely. I didn't see it. But at one time tear gas got into the store. There was a great deal of running in and out. I remember one time down on Shattuck Avenue, some youngsters had been demonstrating and they went into a shop. And the police went in and herded everybody in the shop out, including all the customers, and took them down to jail. There was a big uprising about that among the people who objected to that. Then there was a time when the National Guard was out and you couldn't go on certain streets, and that, I felt, was a terrible thing--very, very bad.

I really felt that whole thing had been handled badly in the beginning and that if it had been ignored completely, if they hadn't made all this hullabaloo about it, that it would have died of its own accord. I think that it was all the publicity it got that fanned the flames. Of course, I may be wrong. I'm looking at it from the outside. I don't know what it would have been like if I had been in a position where I had to make a decision.

But I think many times a thing starts small, and because someone gets uptight, then both get uptight and then it begins--it's like a family quarrel in a way: "You said so!"

"I did not!"

"You did!"

"I didn't!" That kind of thing. Before long, they're rolling around on the floor and having a fight, hair pulling and all.

Hawkins: Whereas when you get older, if you know how to say, "Well, I really shouldn't have said that. I beg your pardon. I'm sorry." Then the other one's left with his mouth hanging open. He can't come back at you because you've already apologized, and you're in a position where you are the superior person. It works over and over again. "Maybe I spoke too roughly. Maybe I was thoughtless. I didn't mean it perhaps the way you thought I did." And then it begins to take the wind out of their sails. But this confrontation business always leads to trouble. That's my opinion. [Laughs]

Business and Books

Maguire: I have some general questions on bookselling and my first one is, are booksellers good businessmen?

Hawkins: [Laughs] Well, some are and some aren't. It's certainly, these days, not for a genteel person. In the old days, sometimes people went into the book business because they thought it was genteel and it was a gentleman's business, but definitely not now. It's a high powered business and not only that, it's a very precarious one. I would never, never, never want to own a bookshop.

Maguire: Are librarians good businessmen, or were they at the time you were involved?

Hawkins: Librarians were the most underpaid people, aside from booksellers, of anybody. Books just aren't big money except at the publishing end. That's where the money is. And they can be losers too, but that is where the money is, the publishing end of it. Not the authors, but the publishers. Some authors make a lot, but the majority do not.

[end tape 1, side 2; begin tape 2, side 1]

Qualities of a Good Bookseller

Maguire: What qualities would you say a bookseller should possess

Hawkins: [Laughs] That's not an easy question. He certainly should possess enthusiasm for what he's doing. He should possess a sense of money because the costs are so high and the profits so little in bookselling; he has to be very keen. If he's the buyer, he has to have an intuition about what's going to sell and what isn't going to sell, and a very great power of selectivity because with very few exceptions, the stock of a bookshop has to be moderate rather than enormous.

Bookselling Today

Hawkins: I no longer think it's necessary to like books, as it was when I sold books. I don't think that a person who likes books, necessarily, is very good at it because it's now a dog-eat-dog sort of a thing. It's a business. It's not a gentleman's game by any means. It's really a jungle. I feel very pessimistic about bookselling. When you're not allowed, if you're a bookseller--that is, a clerk--to serve your customer other than pointing out where certain books might be, I don't consider that bookselling at all. I consider it wrapping up books. It's merchandising, and it's not the same thing at all.

Maguire: Do you ever find real book people in bookstores these days?

Hawkins: Once in awhile you can find them in a few places, yes, the old-timers that are still there. But, generally speaking, it's very hard, certainly in this area. You go into bookstores, for the most part, and they don't wait on you at all. You ask for a certain book--"Well, what subject is it?" They don't know nor care about it. I've called up some bookstores here, when I wanted to find if a certain book was in stock to come downtown and get it, and they say, "Oh, we're too busy. We can't look for it. Come on down to the store."

There's just no sense of service at all, and this is the very great difference between what it was like when I was selling books. The sense of service was tremendous. You really cared that the person found what he was looking for, or what she was looking for, and you tried to find it for them. This business of being absolutely indifferent and just standing at the cash register--"You go and find the book, if you can find it, and bring it and I'll wrap it up for you." They have no more interest in it than that.

Now, there are a few places where that isn't necessarily true but there are not very many, and that is certainly more true than not. But there are a few small places. Of course, I think that Hink's book department is more like a real bookstore because the people that are there were in Sather Gate, most of them worked for Sather Gate, and so they have this idea of a bookshop which Sather Gate never lost.

Maguire: What would you say are the elements of a really great bookstore?

Hawkins: The elements of a great bookstore? Well, I can't say now, because as I say, my idea of a bookstore is a place where you go in and you become aware of all the ideas in the world sitting there waiting for you to find them out, and there is someone there that will help you discover them if you don't know already and open doors for you that you hadn't had open. But that isn't true now. Nobody seems to care.

Maguire: Hypothetically, if you were to open a store now--

Hawkins: Well, if I were going to open a store now, I would have a specialty shop. It wouldn't be a general shop at all. I would either have books on natural history or I would have books on a number of subjects. There would be philosophical ideas, perhaps, or something of that sort. I think it would be more apt to be a specialty shop. I think you're more apt to make a go of it if it's a large enough subject to have people really interested.

Fiction nowadays is not easy to sell, and there is so much fiction coming out. And they're so expensive. Books are so frightfully expensive now--\$13 and \$14 for nonfiction books, just ordinary ones, and \$12--nothing under \$8.95 or \$6.95 in the way of fiction, a mystery story, \$6.95. Paperbacks have really taken over for things like that, and I think a paperback store, generally speaking is more apt to do well than a general bookstore. But then, this is just opinion. I don't know. I may be very wrong.

Television and Reading

Maguire: What would you say the effects of television have been on book sales?

Hawkins: I think television has been deadly as far as children are concerned because I think that television dulls your imagination. My great complaint for television is that you have to take someone else's vision. You don't use your own imagination to visualize something within yourself, so you don't develop your imagination. With books you do. You have to use your imagination and visualize. The words have to have some meaning in your mind. Well, if your children grow up so that they cannot read because--think how limited they are in their imaginations. To me, that's the main advantage of books.

Maguire: Do you think television has really captured the audience?

Hawkins: Well, I think it has to some extent. I think that there are just two things now: there's outdoor sports and television, and many, many children do not read because they substitute television. Of course, I think parents are to blame for this. I see no excuse for it. If a parent just simply locks the TV and says that at certain times we will look at selective programs--which is the way a TV should be used anyway, not just turned on in the morning and just going, going, going, going, going. Then, TV can be very useful.

Hawkins: But the idea of letting a child sit there from the time he's two years old in front of the TV--to say nothing of what the radiation might be, which we do not know. Children don't sit back far enough; they're very apt to come right up against the TV. They miss a lot. The thing about a book is that you can pick it up at any time. You don't have to wait for a certain hour for it to be there. Any time you feel in the mood for it, there's the book. There's much more in the book than you can get in a half hour or an hour on TV, no matter how you slice it.

Right now, I'm doing a week's diary on TV for Nielsen centered around this, and I said to them, "I'm sorry. I'd be glad to do it, but I don't really look at TV a great deal."

The woman said, "That's all right. We want to know what you do look at when you do."

There's a place for comment. I found out the first two days that it was off until night. So I said, "I'm much too busy in the daytime to look at television"--and it's true, much too busy. Then at night I just selected programs.

Many nights I've gone to look at TV, and I've looked at the programs and they've been so dull, I've just gone to bed and taken a book and read. I at least knew that if I had something that I was reading, I knew what I was getting. And if I were reading something I had already read before, it would be something I knew and enjoyed.

To me, nothing can take the place of a book. I have actually been looking at TV and turned it off and got into bed and read a book. I wanted to read. It spoke to me more. But a whole generation of children are growing up where they've never had that feeling about a book, and so the pleasures of reading are absent. They only know the pleasures of the other.

I'm not denigrating TV; I think it has much to offer. It's like going to the theater. You enjoy going to the theater a great deal, but you wouldn't want to go to the theater from the morning until night and see nothing but theater. And that's really what TV is, to a large extent. It's theater.

Book Clubs

Maguire: Do you think that book clubs have affected bookstores?

Hawkins: Yes, I do think so. Book clubs have certainly made certain books very popular. They've picked up one book, and it has much more exposure than it might have had if it hadn't been chosen. I don't think that it's added to the sales of the bookstores necessarily. It might. If the book has been widely spoken about, then people who didn't get the book in the book club would come in and might buy it. Certainly, it might affect the readership in the libraries.

Maguire: Do you think that the stores are losing customers to these clubs?

Hawkins: I don't know. I really don't know. They certainly wouldn't be buying those particular books from a bookstore.

Maguire: Would you say that the American Booksellers Association is an effective organization?

Hawkins: It's a very effective organization. It's gotten bigger and bigger. I haven't been to a Booksellers' meeting for a long time. I'm going to speak at one this April. On the eighth of April I'm going to talk on what it was like in the old days. [Laughs] So this is sort of a preliminary, you might say.

Pleasures of Bookselling

Hawkins: The thing that seems to me different is that I had such joy in my work. I enjoyed it so much. I just can't see how a person selling books today could have the pleasure in selling that you had when you would hear a customer come in and ask you, "I want a book for a boy of eight years old."

"What is the boy like? Does he like sports? How well does he read? What grade is he in?" Then you would go and pick out some books you'd think that he might like, and you bring it to the customer and let the customer look at these books, taking them in about three at a time. Then if she didn't like those, you'd take them away and bring three more out until you found one that was just right, always keeping in mind the child that was involved. Now your customer might not know what an eight year old would like, but you presumably should because that's your job.

Hawkins: All right, now what happens? The customer comes in and says, "I want a book for a child eight years old."

They say, "There are the books over there." So you go over there and you look around, and if you don't know anything about books, you may or may not get a book. Or you may get discouraged and leave. If there aren't any clerks to wait on you, if the person is at the cash register and can't leave and there's nobody else--What fun is it just sitting at a cash register? You might just as well be selling at a register at a grocery store. What's the advantage? To me, bookselling is an art.

In fact, we used to talk about that, whether a person would just wrap up books or was a bookseller. There was a difference. Oh, well, this person just wraps up books. If somebody comes in and asks for such and such a book, he'll get it and give it to them and ring the sale up. But that's not a bookseller; that's just a wrapper-upper. [Laughs]

This really is my feeling about modern bookstores. The ones that do have personalized service, I think, are very much valued by the customers who like to be waited on, and if they can find this bookseller, they'll be their customers for life.

[end of tape 2, side 1; end of Interview V]

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